

Saipan Tribune

CNMI'S FIRST DAILY NEWSPAPER

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INSIDE



Good Sanitation

EJ Corp. expanded since last year its line of business to include pest control and management, knowing as it does the importance of good sanitation in any household or establishment.

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Life in Prison

Lee Boyd Malvo, the young man who teamed up with John Allen Muhammad to terrorize the Washington area in a sniper spree that left 10 people dead, was formally sentenced Wednesday to life in prison without parole.

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Exiled Empress

It could be the eternal wisdom of Persia's great poets, an unforgettable bond to Iran and an everlasting love for a ruler the world shunned in his last days that have kept Farah Pahlavi anchored.

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AG sues Stanley, 2 others

Lawmaker charged for same scheme that sent two senators to jail

By JOHN RAVELO
REPORTER

The Attorney General's Office yesterday filed 62 criminal charges against ex-congressman Stanley Torres and two former legislative staff for alleged involvement in a ghost employee scheme.

The alleged beneficiary of the scheme is Dorothy Sablan, who used to be Torres' office manager. The 29-page criminal information alleged that Sablan received at least five checks totaling \$5,384.67 in government payroll in 2003.

The AGO also named former legislative staff Frank S. Ada as defendant in the case. Ada allegedly prepared fraudulent time and attendance sheets indicating that Sablan rendered



Torres

work when she was off-island. The former congressman faces 20 criminal counts; Sablan, 30 counts; and Ada, 12 counts.

The case stemmed from an investigation jointly conducted by the Office of the Public Auditor and the AG's Investigative Unit, following the creation of an anti-public corruption division within the AGO.

Deputy Attorney General Clyde
See AG on Page 8



CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

MAN AMKO FUNDRAISER

Driver Caroline Remke asks to have her gas receipt stamped last week at Shell Puerto Rico so a portion of her purchase can be donated to the man'amko. Man'amko Marcelina Taitano receives the receipt, joined by Rosa Castro, Feliciano Taisacan, Angelica Omar and Shell gas attendant Kelani Deleon Guerrero. Shell stations in Puerto Rico, Koblerville, Dandan, and Gualo Rai (Highway Express) will be stamping receipts upon request through April 15, 2004, and donating 1.5 percent to the man'amko.

PSS needs \$1.1M to pay off vendors

By LIBERTY DONES
REPORTER

The Public School System is asking the Babauta administration for immediate funding relief totaling \$1.1 million to pay off its vendors.

Board of Education chairman Roman C. Benavente said the PSS has yet to settle \$300,000 for fiscal year 2003 and \$250,000 for the first four months of fiscal year 2004. The amounts are owed to vendors that supply goods and services to PSS students and schools.

In a recent letter to Gov. Juan N. Babauta, Benavente and education commissioner Rita H. Inos said that, in addition to the FY 2003 cash debt, "we must add the billings from vendors who provided services or goods based on

See PSS on Page 8

CUC board OK's \$70M budget for FY05

By LIBERTY DONES
REPORTER

The Commonwealth Utilities Corp. Board of Directors has approved a \$70.2-million budget for fiscal year 2005—a 4 percent-plus increase compared to FY 2004.

The approved budget reflects an \$8.1 million "director's cut" of "general

administration and operations."

CUC executive director Lorraine A. Babauta said in a report that the budget slash means no new purchases of heavy equipment, no new

vehicles, and cut-back on construction and maintenance contracts.

She said it also means no wage increases outside of the 2004 salary adjustment as recommended by CUC-hired consultant, Fox Lawson.

The 2005 budget covers \$15.8 million for personnel services and \$54.3 million for administrative and operations.

See CUC on Page 8



Babauta

Arrivals up 5 percent in Feb.

By JOHN RAVELO
REPORTER

Japanese arrivals to the CNMI managed to halt the decline in most of the CNMI's tourist markets in February, which posted an overall 5-percent growth compared to the same period last year.

Visitor entry totaled 46,632 last month, higher by 2,226 compared to Feb. 2003's 44,406, based on statistics provided by the Marianas Visitors Authority.

See ARRIVALS on Page 8



Local

diabetes
+green

CPA bent on increasing revenue this year

By **EDITH G. ALEJANDRO**
REPORTER

The Commonwealth Ports Authority is determined to increase its revenue for fiscal year 2004 by cutting costs in several areas without affecting the security and operations of all CNMI airports.

CPA executive director Carlos H. Salas disclosed that the recent feasibility study conducted by Ricondo and Associates outlined the cost-cutting measures to be implemented at CNMI airports without hampering operations.

“The study looked at every angle to cut cost but maintain essential services at the airport

division. The seaport division is currently afloat so we don’t have a problem with that,” said Salas in an interview.

The executive director added that the study also outlined the maintenance of airport services and how to get additional revenue that would cushion the airport division’s revenue in due time.

Salas said the study also laid out the airport’s financial plan in the next several years to allow them to meet its obligations and continue with several airport improvement projects.

“This would only be at the airport division so that we meet our debt ratio. The cost cutting measures are ready and we hope to be in full compliance with all our obligations,” he explained.

Salas stressed that, of the immediate plans, CPA is carefully looking at the implementation of the Passenger Facility Charge—a fee that would help the airport division meets its obligation and at the same time finance the 10-percent matching fund needed for the federally funded airport improvement projects.

However, Salas clarified that no other severe cost-cutting measures would be implemented since CPA has been tightening its belt for the past several years. Other cost-cutting measures would only be implemented in areas where additional measures can be enforced without sacrificing its capabilities.

PSS wants amendment to get unused OPA money

By **LIBERTY DONES**
REPORTER

The Board of Education favors legislative action that would allow the Public School System to reclaim unused appropriation that the Office of the Public Auditor returns to the General Funds.

Record showed that the board unanimously approved this approach upon the recommendation of the education commissioner during a committee meeting on Feb. 5.

“The [commissioner] moved that unused appropriation returned to [the general fund] by the OPA [should] revert back to the PSS. It was recommended that this be addressed through an amendment of the law requiring the PSS to submit 1 percent of its budget to the OPA,” a portion of the Feb. 5 BOE minutes of meeting said.

The PSS intends to submit a proposed amendment to the law, which currently requires all government agencies to remit 1 percent of their operational budget to OPA every year to cover for auditing costs.

PSS finance officer Richard

Waldo said yesterday there were reports that OPA does not really use up its audit money.

“We might as well get back the money. We need it very badly,” he said, citing the tight budget situation the system is facing right now.

Earlier, PSS noted that it loses a significant portion of its annual appropriation to legislative deductions, including the OPA, and the 2 percent pay-off for the CNMI deficit.

The Legislature deducts 2 percent from all government-approved budgets to settle a longstanding CNMI government

budget deficit. This means giving away some \$744,000 for the deficit and about \$372,000 for OPA every year.

PSS gets a total budget of \$37 million a year. PSS spends about \$34.3 million for personnel, nearly \$2 million for operations, and some \$84,000 for housing allowance of certain employees.

Recently, PSS submitted a \$48 million proposed budget for FY 2005, a \$3.4 million supplemental budget for the current year, and some \$1.1 million urgent budget to settle its pending obligation to vendors.

Power outage on Feeder 4

The Commonwealth Utilities Corp. is scheduling a power outage tomorrow, March 13, from 7am to 4 pm on Feeder 4. This scheduled outage is needed so crews could conduct maintenance work. Because of the extreme danger in working on energized lines, a power outage is necessary to ensure the line crew’s safety.

The outage will affect the Feeder 4 lateral. Areas affected by this outage include the entire Kagman I Homestead area. No traffic lights will be affected.

CUC requests the cooperation and patience of people driving and residing in these areas while the work is completed.

House members briefed on water plans

By **MARIAN A. MARAYA**
REPORTER

House members attended the Water Task Force’s report yesterday on its plan of action toward achieving 24-hour water services on Saipan.

Task force chairman Lt. Gov. Diego T. Benavente and the task force’s management team, headed by Don Smith, underscored the importance of installing meters to encourage water conservation among consumers.

The experts made the presentation complete with maps and visuals at the task force’s war room in Capitol Hill.

In the audience were House members led by Speaker Benigno R. Fitia and Vice Speaker Timothy Villagomez, a former executive director of the Commonwealth Utilities Corp.

“[The presentation was] especially important for the members of the Legislature because there will be some key legislation that we would need, whether it’s to regulate the system that needs to be looked into, or the overall management plan of our water source. And of course, more importantly, there would be additional need for funding. We’re going to need the Legislature’s help,” Benavente said in an interview.

Smith’s presentation tackled the different aspects of the Saipan Water Project.

Among others, he outlined recommendations issued by the

U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to initiate efforts toward making critical changes to the water distribution system, regulating underground fuel storage tanks, conducting a rate study and establishing government ownership of groundwater resources, to name a few.

“There are a lot of things that we can do to improve the system right now. But if we are going to be successful in providing the 24-hour pressure, we’re going to need people to conserve and not waste [water],” stressed the task force chairman.

He cited an Army Corps study that stated that 90 percent of water waste is produced by residential consumers.

Benavente reiterated that the only way to stop this is to install meters so that consumers will pay their water bills based on their use.

The task force disclosed that the bid has been released for the purchase of 4,000 meters that

would be installed in residential areas as soon as they arrive.

Further, Benavente also quoted the Army Corps as saying that between 9 to 11 million gallons of water is being pumped out of Saipan water wells.

“Even if you bring that down to 7 million or even 5 million a day—because there are some wells that have become salty and have been shut down, or because of problems—based on the population that we have of 60,000 people, minus 30 percent for those who have their own private wells, we’re still looking at less than 50,000 people that actually get water from CUC.

“So even if our wells are not producing the 9 million and are only producing 5 million gallons of water a day, we should still have enough to provide 24-hour water per person per day, based on the average of 100 gallons per person per day,” explained Benavente.



OES report card day set

The Acting Principal of Oleai Elementary School would like to inform the parents and guardians of Oleai Elementary School that the 3rd quarter Report Card Day will be on Tuesday, March 16, 2004, from 4 pm to 6 pm. Please remind your children that there will be no classes on this day. Parents and guardians are highly encouraged to pick up their child(ren)’s report card and meet with their teachers and also join us for our Academic Fair in the cafeteria.

Days off at KES

Koblerville Elementary School is reminding parents and guardians of its students that there is no school on Tuesday, March 16, and Wednesday, March 24. Tuesday, March 16, is staff development day for teachers. Wednesday, March 24, is the Covenant Day holiday.

BANMI Inc. election set

The Bicol Association in Northern Mariana Islands Inc. (BANMI, Inc) is inviting all Bicolanos to its annual election of officers and board of directors to be held on March 14, 2004, Sunday, at the Bicol Pavilion on Kili Beach, Susupe (in front of Ada gym, beside the children’s park). The election will be held from 9am to 5pm. For more information, contact Danny and Elmer at 288-53-28; Jaye at 288-50-86, and Eddie at 234-19-09.

UPAA meeting this Saturday

The University of the Philippines Alumni Association-CNMI Chapter will have a meeting tomorrow, March 13, at the Filipino Workers Resource Center at Nauru Building in Susupe. Meeting starts at 7pm.

Women’s forum set

Rep. Janet U. Maratita is hosting a forum at Pacific Island Club on March 18, 2004, 11:30am-2 pm, in recognition of CNMI women for the month of March.

All women are invited to participate in this forum to share ideas, meet new friends, unite and continue to work together in promoting women’s interest.

Interested participants are asked to call the Women’s Affairs Office at 664-2294/5 or Maratita’s office at 664-8965 for reservation. Please call by Monday, March 22nd to confirm your participation.

New work hours for DLNR, related agencies

The Department of Lands and Natural Resources Office and the Division of Land Registration and Survey Office at Lower Base announced they will be open from 6:30am to 2:30pm effective immediately through next week.

The early opening and early closure is because the central air conditioning units are broken and the 8,000 square foot metal building has no windows, DLNR said in a media advisory.

Acting DLNR Secretary Richard B. Seman said he anticipates the air conditioning units to be fixed by the end of next week. By then the two offices will return to operating on the standard 7:30am to 4:30pm government work hours.

Environment prize seeks nominees

The Gloria Barron Prize for Young Heroes is seeking nominations for its 2004 awards. The Barron Prize recognizes young people ages 8 to 18 who have shown leadership and courage in public service to people and our planet. Half of each year’s winners are chosen for their work to protect the environment. Winners receive \$2,000 to support their service work or higher education.

Nomination deadline is April 30, 2004. For more information and to nominate, visit www.barronprize.org. Barbara Ann Richman Program Director Gloria Barron Prize for Young Heroes PO BOX 17 Boulder, CO 80306 (970) 875-1448 www.barronprize.org

NMA fundraising set

The Northern Marianas Academy seniors are trying to raise funds for an upcoming trip to Cairns, Australia.

Their main fundraiser will take place on Friday, March 12, at 5pm at the NMA campus.

“On behalf of the Northern Marianas Academy seniors we would like to apologize for any inconvenience and thank you for your understanding and support,” the class said in a statement.

1040 Form distribution set

The Division of Revenue and Taxation wishes to inform all CNMI residents that the distribution of the 2003 1040 forms and instruction has already begun. Those who would like to pick up a copy can drop by at the Office of the Division of Revenue and Taxation located at the DanDan Commercial Center from 8am to 4pm.

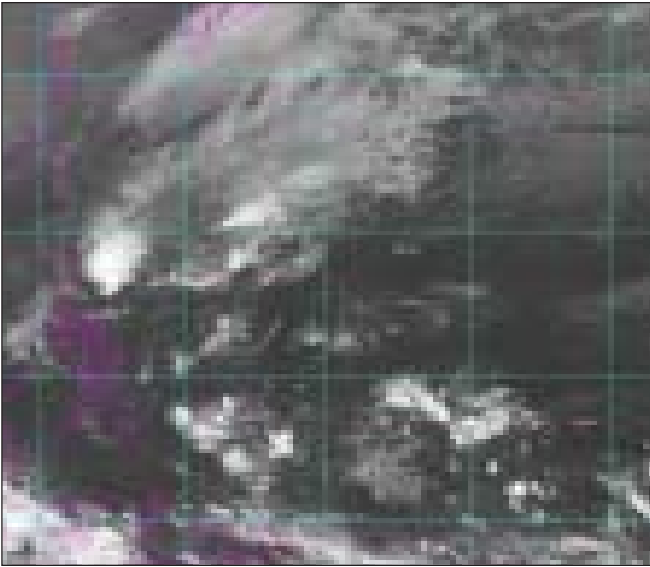
All residents are asked to pick up the forms during regular business hours. Please be reminded that the deadline for filing 2003 1040 is Thursday, April 15, 2004 at 12am (midnight).

DES raffle draw postponed to May

The Dandan Elementary School has postponed its 6th Annual Cultural Day Raffle Drawing and Festivities from Feb. 14 to May 22.

“We apologize for the inconvenience this has brought upon the parents and others who have made efforts to participate in this school function. On behalf of the administration, teachers, parents, students, and the PTA officers of their school community, we thank you for your understanding and continued support in every way possible,” said the school in a media statement.

WEATHER FORECAST



PICTURE TIME: 1:00 A.M., MARCH 11, 2004
Western North Pacific between Equator and 25N from 130E to 180.

Fresh to strong trade winds across much of Micronesia converging into lighter winds near the Equator are producing scattered showers between the Equator and 8n from 130e to 153 and between the Equator and 6n from 160e to 180. A cold front stretches from 25n161e to 20n146e and continues as a shear line to 19n130e. Low- and mid-level clouds...light rain and showers associated this feature extend up to 200 miles north of the boundary. Trade wind convergence south of the cold front/shear line is producing low clouds and showers between 12n and 18n from 132e to 150e. This area includes the Mariana Islands.

SAIPAN AND TINIAN
Partly cloudy with isolated showers.
Winds: East at 15-20 mph. Highs near 87. Lows near 76.

GUAM AND ROTA
Partly cloudy with isolated showers.
Winds: East at 15-20 mph. Highs near 87. Lows near 76.

PALAU
Mostly cloudy with isolated showers.
Winds: Northeast at 15-20 kt.

POHNPEI
Mostly cloudy with isolated showers.
Winds: Northeast at 15 kt.

YAP AND ULITHI
Mostly cloudy with isolated showers.
Winds: Northeast at 15-20 kt.

KOSRAE
Mostly cloudy with isolated showers.
Winds: East at 10-15 kt.

CHUUK
Partly cloudy with isolated showers.
Winds: Northeast at 15-20 kt.

MAJURO
Mostly cloudy with scattered showers.
Winds: East at 15-20 kt.

	CITY	FORECAST	HIGH	LOW
	Auckland	Sunny	71F (22C)	60F (16C)
	Beijing	Sunny	65F (18C)	48F (9C)
	Hong Kong	Sunny	74F (23C)	61F (16C)
	Honolulu	Partly Cloudy	82F (28C)	68F (20C)
	London, England	Sunny	45F (7C)	30F (-1C)
	Los Angeles	Sunny	79F (26C)	59F (15C)
	Manila	Partly Cloudy	88F (31C)	73F (23C)
	Melbourne	Sunny	75F (24C)	59F (15C)
	Miami	Partly Cloudy	72F (22C)	54F (12C)
	New York City	Cloudy	40F (4C)	34F (1C)
	Osaka	Partly Cloudy	37F (3C)	25F (-4C)
	Paris	Partly Cloudy	38F (3C)	25F (-4C)
	Pusan	Partly Cloudy	53F (12C)	39F (4C)
	Rome	Cloudy	49F (9C)	30F (-1C)
	Salem, Oregon	Partly Cloudy	60F (16C)	40F (4C)
	San Francisco	Sunny	68F (20C)	52F (11C)
	Seoul	Partly Cloudy	47F (8C)	35F (2C)
	Tokyo, Japan	Partly Cloudy	42F (6C)	36F (2C)
	Washington, DC	Cloudy	45F (7C)	34F (1C)

Bill wants DPS to focus on police work

By MARIAN A. MARAYA
REPORTER

The House of Representatives yesterday passed legislation that seeks to raise the threshold for traffic accident damage reporting from \$250 to \$1,500.

Rep. Clyde Norita, author of House Bill 14-19, explained that the measure’s intent is to refocus Department of Public Safety officers’ hours to critical assignments instead of trivial responsibilities.

“DPS through current law must respond to every traffic accident with property damage that’s \$250 or more and/or bodily injury. On average, DPS responds to over 3,000 traffic accidents a year. In working with DPS and Motor Vehicle, we found out that just over 75 percent of those accidents average \$1,000 in property damage.

“Just like in other states in the mainland that raised the thresh-old of the reporting for property damage to an acceptable level, the officers’ time are more com-mitted toward more law enforce-ment work, public safety, direct emergency and so forth,” said Norita, a former law enforcement officer.

A report prepared by the House Committee on Judicial and Governmental Operations indicated that DPS’ investigation of traffic accidents with damages amounting to over \$250 commits the department to over 10,000 manpower hours per year.

“We need to alleviate this concern and put more officers on the streets doing real police work. And it’s a simple solution. All we have to do is raise the threshold from \$250 to \$1,500,” said Norita.

In further justifying the need

for the legislation, the former DPS officer added that the police department has over \$4 million in personnel overtime deficit.

Thirteen members assented yesterday to HB 14-19’s passage, against the three “No” votes cast by Minority Leader Heinz S. Hofschneider and Reps. Joe Guerrero and David Apatang.

Hofschneider conceded that, although the bill would refocus DPS manpower to more essential services, he fears increases in automobile insurance premiums as a result of this.

“His [Hofschneider] concern is the repercussion on the insurance policy, that they might raise the premiums. And of course, that could be a possibility. But then again, we have to look at the cost of government service, specifically on a situation where incidents that are tying up police work. It’s

traditional work that DPS is doing and we have to stop and say, ‘It’s not 500 car accidents a year anymore, it’s 3,000,’” Norita said.

The JGO committee said that insurance firms were summoned to submit comments on HB 14-19 but none responded.

Yesterday’s House session saw the passage of a total of five bills, including HB 14-19.

Other bills approved included HB 14-18, which seeks to mandate the display of license plates on both the front and rear of vehicles and HB 14-17, which reappropriates \$116,385 to complete the road paving of Nan Ocha leading to the Flores compound.

The House also passed HB 14-81 to require timely refunds of security deposits; and HB 14-73, which seeks to establish the Commonwealth Uniform Partnership Act.

TSA awaiting confirmation on Tinian direct flights

By EDITH G. ALEJANDRO
REPORTER

The Transportation Security Administration-Saipan Office is still awaiting confirmation on the scheduled direct air service to West Tinian International Airport before complete federalization rollover could be conducted.

TSA-Saipan Customer Support and Quality Improvement Manager Viola Sablan said the agency is still waiting for the information it needs before it can proceed with the federalization of the Tinian airport.

Sablan explained that as soon as confirmation from the China Southern Airlines is forwarded, TSA-Saipan would immediately process the

deployment of federal screeners to the Tinian airport.

Further, Sablan said all regulatory matters should be addressed as TSA-Saipan works on the technical aspects of the project with the Commonwealth Ports Authority.

“Still the same, we are still waiting for the confirmation from China Southern Air. We are still in the process and once we get all the information we need, we can immediately request from the head office,” said the quality improvement manager.

She added that all documents and project plans and proposals would have to pass final review of the U.S. Transportation Security Administration in Washington D.C.

“We would submit all these

to the headquarters for final review and approval,” she added.

The CPA leadership had earlier said that arrangements are still being made on the federalization of the Tinian airport.

CPA executive director Carlos H. Salas said that because of the decision of China Southern Airlines to begin direct air service to the West Tinian International Airport on April 23, 2004, there would also be slight changes in the arrangements being undertaken by the CPA and the TSA-Saipan Office.

“I heard that they would move their direct flights to April. We have not finalized yet on when the screeners would be deployed or how many. We have yet to tackle that with the TSA. Nothing is concrete yet and we

would just wait for the final decision of the airline,” said Salas in an interview.

TSA-Saipan and CPA stressed that certain security measures should be in place and that China Southern Airlines has concurred with this.

China Southern Air will be using a Boeing 757 with a seating capacity of 198 passengers for each flight. This would translate to an additional 15,000 visitors from China to the CNMI this year alone.

Once the Tinian International Airport is approved to handle outbound international passengers, the flights will go directly from Shanghai to Tinian on April 2004, according to Tinian Dynasty Hotel and Casino chair Michael Kwan.

Crime Stoppers seeks help in Garapan stabbing

The NMI Crime Stoppers is asking the help of the community to solve a stabbing incident last month in Garapan where two unidentified men ganged up on a 28-year-old man near the Capital Bowling Center.

According to investigation, Jasen Ada was found on the road south of the Hong Kong store near the Capital Bowling Center early morning in Feb. 2004.

Two unidentified men had reportedly accosted and attacked the victim. Ada sustained stab wounds in the abdomen, neck, and back. He was immediately transported to the Commonwealth Health Center where he was treated.

Crime Stoppers coordinator Sgt. Tom Blas Jr. said that the case is still under investigation; no arrest has been made yet. He urged individuals who may have information on the stabbing incident to call the anti-crime tips line at 234-7272.

“Anyone who may have information about this incident can call the NMI Crime Stoppers

tips line and leave their information. All calls are anonymous. They don’t have to leave their names,” said Blas.

Anyone having information about this incident can call CIB office at 664-9042/9045 or the NMI Crime Stoppers hotline at

234-7272. The NMI Crime Stoppers pays up to \$1,000 for information leading to an arrest. (Edith G. Alejandro)

Opinion

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EDITORIAL

The ethics of science

Benjamin Franklin and Thomas Jefferson both dabbled in science as well as politics. Nowadays, American scientists and American politicians more often find themselves separated by a gulf of mutual ignorance and distrust. A rare institution that has tried to overcome that gulf is the President's Council on Bioethics. The council is unusual both because its membership includes "right-to-lifers" as well as some of the country's best-known scientists, and because its nuanced, painstaking public reports have tried to accommodate the views of all, albeit not always to everyone's satisfaction.

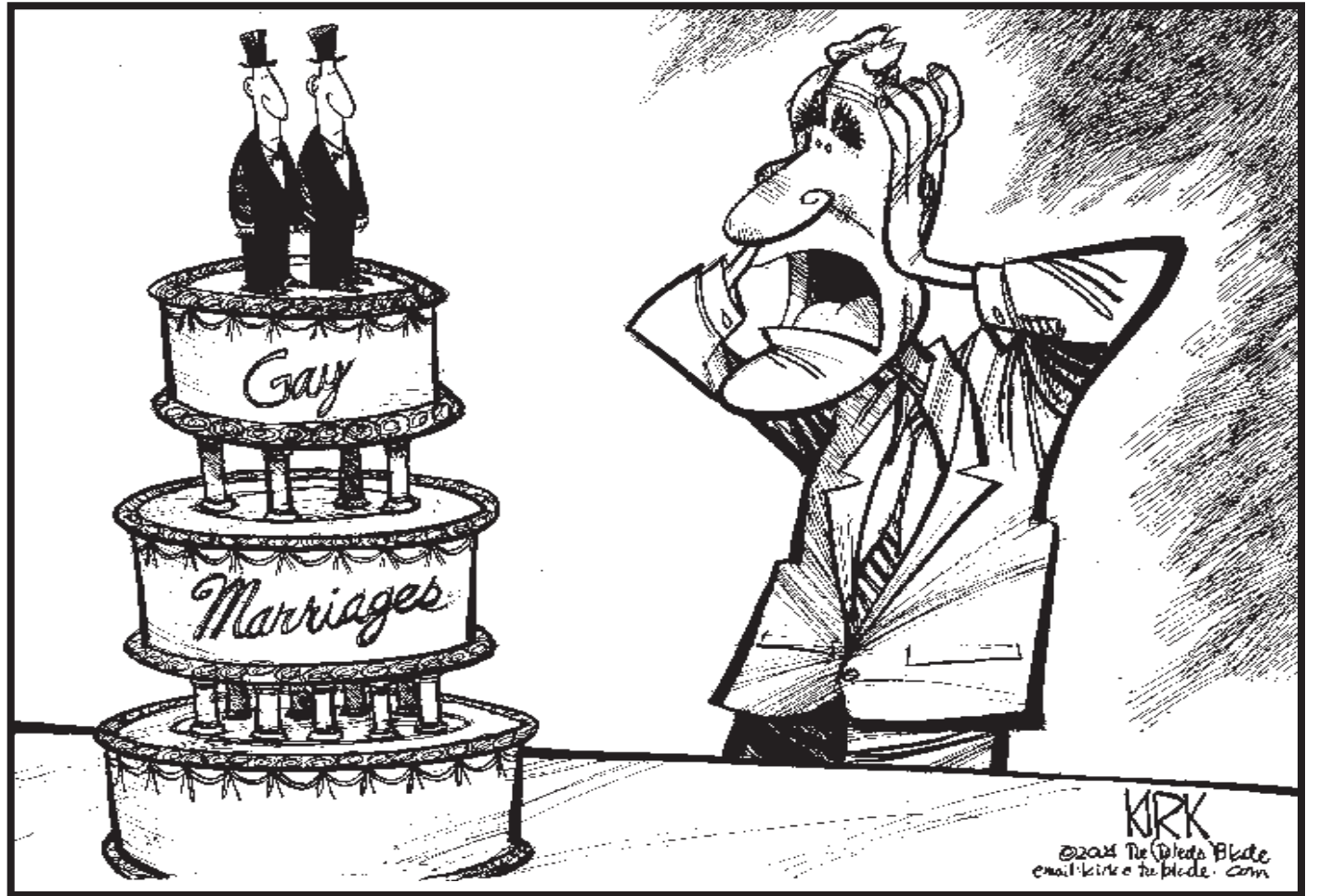
Last week, some of that collegiality seemed to break down. Elizabeth Blackburn, a council member who was abruptly dismissed, accused the Bush administration of trying to reshape the council to suit its views, and thus "hold science hostage to ideology." The council chairman, Leon Kass, denies the charge as well as any desire to change the council's political makeup. The squabble, which seems partly to revolve around a series of misunderstandings, might easily be dismissed as a tempest in a teapot if the function that the council serves—trying to draw regulatory and ethical lines around startling new forms of research—were not so important.

As if to underline that point, one of those lines, drawn earlier in the course of this administration, began to look fainter last week. On Wednesday, some Harvard scientists announced that they had created 17 new colonies of human embryonic stem cells, more than doubling the world's supply. The colonies, they said, were created without federal research funding, which—after President Bush declared a moratorium on federal support for stem-cell creation in August 2001—was restricted to the 78 cell lines then in existence. The president's decision was taken on the grounds that the creation of stem cell lines requires the destruction of five-day-old human embryos.

In practice, the president's decision created as much ambiguity as it resolved. It didn't prevent scientists and doctors from creating or destroying human embryos, practices that are still part of some fertility treatments. As the Harvard announcement proved, it also didn't prevent scientists from searching for other sources of funding for the research. The compromise seems also to have failed to leave enough stem cells for researchers to work on: According to an unpublished report circulating on Capitol Hill, only 15 usable stem cell lines remain. Prohibiting the creation of more could have the effect of retarding research into life-saving treatments of several medical conditions. It could also have the effect of chasing good scientists out of the country: Not everybody has the same access to private funding as the Harvard cell biologists, and if they can't find research money here, they'll find it elsewhere.

The president's policy, while perhaps well-intentioned, has neither allowed good research to continue nor prevented science from going down the "slippery slope" it was already headed toward. The policy must be re-examined—and in an atmosphere of total honesty about what the scientific and moral consequences of new funding and regulatory decisions will be. The President's Council on Bioethics is still one of the few institutions that could offer advice. Its chairman, its members and the Bush administration must bend even further backward to prove that they really do intend to take all views into account.

The Washington Post



...and the train speeds on

It has been suggested to me that the lack of reality in the CNMI government's treatment of NMC could be characterized as a "financial hemorrhage" and alternatively as "scraping the bottom of the barrel." I write to suggest a third metaphor: NMC as a locomotive on a track headed for a train wreck with the CNMI government as the conductor. The conductor is unwilling to accept the pain of taking either of the only two alternative tracks.

Ultimately, of course, either alternative is less painful than the train wreck but the government refuses to act to prevent the wreck either because of wishful thinking or because they believe someone else will be at the helm when it comes. And the train speeds on.

I do not exaggerate. In June of 2003 (well before the purchase of the La Fiesta mall by NMC) the WASC accrediting agency officially "warned" NMC and did "not accept" NMC's report of financial condition. Despite having made enormous strides toward respectability in the previous 10 months in overcoming years of neglect, our records were still inadequate and our financial condition precarious. And the train speeds on.

To this day I am unable to ascertain from our records whether it is true as alleged that NMC has had only a single year of finishing in the black: the one year that I was at the helm for a full fiscal year. It is certainly true that NMC overspent its budget in each of the seven years that preceded my arrival. Balancing the budget in 2003 was achieved despite a \$400,000 penalty in that year's budget due to the prior year's overspending. And legislative appropriation has been flat for five consecutive years even as enrollment has increased by 30 percent over the base year (1999). The College continues to employ too many people. We currently employ 414 percent of the national average of employees in the "institutional support" category and 292 percent in the "administrator" category. Having too many people means many have little to do. It was the Regents themselves who called to my attention specific individuals they personally know to be under utilized.

The government has made it abundantly clear it expects NMC to continue employing those people, needed or not, and the same government declines to provide the support necessary. In addition to creating obvious financial peril, the presence of workers with little to do has a debilitating effect upon the morale of others and is devastating to organizational achievement. Down this track lies the train wreck and it is already coming into view in the form of a second official accreditation warning from WASC. And the train speeds on.

Readers may wonder why accreditation is important. Loss of accreditation would cost NMC eligibility for federal grants and cost NMC students eligibility for Pell grant tuition support. Enrollment would drop by more than 50 percent unless, of course, the CNMI government could find funds to replace the lost Pell grants. And despite the assurances of our resident expert on accreditation, Senator Songao, SB 14-22 is sure to bring additional pressure from WASC.

In partial defense of the CNMI government's inability to support the college as presently structured note that by one important measure, our Legislature's appropriation currently is at the national mean among comparable institutions. They admittedly are laboring under a lack of resources. One issue about which the people of the CNMI should be

By KENNETH E. WRIGHT

The writer is a former NMC President..



concerned is why money earmarked for the College does not find its way into the intended place. Of the \$9 million collected last year in 10-66 taxes for hiring foreign workers (ostensibly intended to support vocational training for CNMI residents) only \$1 million found its way into NMC's coffers. Eight million was siphoned off for other legislative agendas. And the train speeds on.

It does not require a rocket scientist to see that the College is faced with a choice between two alternatives: If the CNMI cannot afford the College as presently designed then we should either (1) reduce the spending plan to an affordable size or (2) find alternate sources of funding. The latter choice is what led me to propose the Gateway project. I never promised that it was without initial costs or without risks; only that it held great potential. I might add that Gateway was first proposed in September of 2002 with a target, if implemented then, of fall 2004. The La Fiesta mall was purchased on January 1, 2004 with no change in target date. Yet the budget for recruiting international students has now been reduced and architectural work on the renovation put on hold while we pretend that facilities inadequate for their present purpose will somehow attract and accommodate hundreds of international students. And the College is days away from a delicate decision whether to commit to hiring the faculty needed to teach the additional international students. And the train speeds on.

When the leadership team of the College, at the Board's urging and my direction, explored alternative budget reduction options, the results were described as having created hysteria. And the reaction (it would be a misnomer to call it a decision) was to shoot the messenger.

Two more accreditation reports are due on April 1, 2004. I am confident the staff will do a good job of reporting the truth in those reports. Almost certainly the reports will be followed shortly thereafter by a visit from WASC officials to find out what is behind the reports. They will not like what they find. To paraphrase Judge Learned Hand, the wheels of accreditation turn very slowly but they grind exceedingly fine. And the train speeds on.

Northern Marianas College is an institution of vital importance to the Commonwealth. All of the ingredients are there necessary to make a substantial contribution to the social well-being of our people, the careers of our youth, and prosperity of our economy. All that is needed is a broad commitment on the part of the people and their representatives to see that this crucial institution flourishes. I implore the people of the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands to actively support Northern Marianas College including the willingness to make the hard decisions that lie just ahead.

Oil and my warm sake

Ever feel the heat that your concrete block walls radiate late in the day? Cazart, thank goodness for air conditioning, which we know on a nickname basis as “aircon.” That’s a short name for long alchemy: We take fossil fuel, burn it to produce electricity, which drives our air conditioner compressors, which cools the air...and never stops cooling it, since most homes are concrete heat boxes, entirely devoid of any meaningful level of insulation.

How long can we afford to air condition the entire Pacific atmosphere?

Although fuel prices fluctuate, the price spike we see at the gas pump might really be the beginning of a global fuel crunch. Such a crunch is inevitable, but I don’t know if this is the real thing or just a false alarm.

Either way, the day will arrive when fuel costs would drive electricity costs so high that aircon becomes a very expensive proposition. That will be just one of many woes related to a fuel crunch, but how many things can we worry about all at the same time?

Oil really is some kind of real-world magic. It is liquid energy that can be stored, carried, transported, and then used at will. I used to work in the alternative energy industry; wind power and solar power are interesting realms, but they have a lot of technical

obstacles. These industries were largely rooted in ridiculous tax schemes under (this won’t surprise you) the Carter administration. Synopsis: The power generation process is ticklish enough, but once that’s surmounted, the plain fact is that you can’t store electricity in any industrial quantities. Period. Show me a city run by batteries. Show me a city where you don’t flip the light switch unless the sun is shining or the wind is blowing. If you have visions of such a city dancing in your head, please seek professional help immediately.

Anyway, back to the oil and alternative energy gig. Let’s consider the transportation imperative. How are you going to make a 747, or a helicopter air ambulance, fly without burning oil? Wind it up? Put in batteries? Ha! Aviation fuels are a science, and a complicated one at that. Yes, I wish we could all have some granola, hold hands, and sing kum-bay-ah so that airplanes could fly on hemp juice, solar power, or organically harvested whale urine, but that’s just not going to happen.

I do not forecast oil prices, so I don’t really follow the demand or supply side of the equation. Eventually, however, that supply has got to dwindle...doesn’t it? And industrializing Asia will certainly be pushing up demand...right? Then what? Well, barring some technological miracle, the industrialized economies will reach for nuclear power for electricity, thus freeing up oil for transportation uses. There’s simply no way around it. Memo to

By **ED STEPHENS**

Ed Stephens, Jr. is an economist and columnist for the Saipan Tribune. “Ed4Saipan@yahoo.com”



self: Research stocks in the companies that make nuclear plants.

The Commonwealth, of course, isn’t exactly in the market for a nuclear power plant, so we are entirely at the mercy of the global oil market. Sure, you can “live off the grid” and employ photovoltaic (solar) power for some basic needs, but I’ve yet to see anyone power a big refrigerator, aircon, and properly amplified Aerosmith tunes with such a setup. Whoa—warm houses, no rock n’ roll, and hot beer? Yikes.

And so the era of poorly insulated concrete hothouses may draw to a close eventually, as home construction evolves to account for energy prices. Instead of being relics, maybe the Last Command Post and the WWII bunkers are the designs of the future. Hey, why not? Warm sake sure beats warm beer. Kampai!

Letters to the Editor

Saipan Tribune welcomes contributions. All letters intended for publication must include the writer's name, address and, if possible, fax or telephone number. Letters are edited for space, clarity and fairness.

An open letter to the people of the CNMI

Following the CTC meeting this week, I feel compelled to make a statement to the people of the CNMI just to clarify the record for everyone and present the facts. We have undertaken an exhaustive two-year journey to purchase Verizon Micronesia because we believe in the investment, the employees, the community and the future.

The Governor has again expressed his opposition to the deal based on several questions in his letter of March 9, 2004, which I will address with facts and make pledges directly to you, all of the people we want to serve.

In the closing paragraph of the Governor’s letter he states, “Once these questions are fully explored and answered, we will all support this transaction.” Let me explore and answer all of the Governor’s questions with facts that are in the U.S. Government Federal record and the Philippine Government Federal record and finally submitted to the Commonwealth Telecommunications Commission:

1. The Governor questions PTI’s technical and managerial capability. PTI has pledged to keep every employee of the company to include all of the managers and technicians that currently serve the entire CNMI. Currently MTC operates as a phone company on its own and there is no investment from Verizon in the U.S. The 141 employees that are your neighbors, relatives and friends will continue to operate this company—nothing will change in the organization except ownership. What better technical and managerial capability exists other than the current employees of the company? They are all guaranteed a year of employment and I have no doubt that most of the employees will be with us for years to come.

As for the Governor’s contention about our obligations in the Philippines, we submitted all the details of our business dealing surrounding Islacom to the FCC and the CTC and the investigation by the Philippines government is closed and the last report by the NTC (the Philippines FCC equivalent) stated, “NTC regional offices conducted an inspection on March 11-16, 2002. The inspection disclosed that the applicant has substantially complied with its roll out obligation under EO 109, having served a total of 321 out of 399 committed areas, or an equivalent of 80.45 percent coverage.” The above information is part of public record both with the FCC, NTC and the CTC. I have always felt very proud of our accomplishments in Islacom, as we took the company from zero dollars to our stake being sold for over \$60 million.

Islacom had us work to install 300,000 new lines in a mountainous terrain whereas MTC is just 25,000 installed lines with nothing more to do than to maintain an already existing telephone network. I have stated for the record, and it will be part of annual required future submissions to the CTC, that PTI will

continue to invest capital expenditure dollars in the network to the tune of \$16 million in the next four years. To do anything other than invest in the network will have all of our customers upset with us, which will mean that we will make less as a company and mean that I would be jeopardizing my investment. Making an investment to see the investment fail is not a reason to invest. I would not continue to pursue the purchase of MTC for two plus years only to flush our money down the drain.

2. The Governor’s second concern “I have expressed concern over the ability of MTC, if owned by PTI, to comply with the federal policy of rate integration.” First and foremost, we have pledged on public record to maintain rate integration for five years. But let me clear up this issue once and for all. If any telecommunications company in the CNMI had long distance rates of \$2 dollars per minute, would anyone use them? I know I wouldn’t; I would switch to another telecom company. For anyone who doesn’t know, competition in the long distance business is alive and well in the CNMI, with over 100 choices of phone companies to use for services. One can get rates as low as \$.02 cents a minute to the U.S., either by dialing prepaid or by using other long distance carriers. Again, for the record, we’ve pledged to maintain rate integrated rates but I can’t see us ever going back to high rates as long as there is competition in long distance, which is not going to disappear anytime soon.

3. The Governor’s next concern “I felt that local ownership is important. One of my goals was to ensure a meaningful degree of local ownership in PTI so that a public interest and understanding would be maintained.”

We at PTI have pledged on public record to establish a trust fund with a 10-percent ownership stake for the employees of MTC, who again are your relatives, neighbors and friends. What better way to ensure that the local community interests are served than by giving an ownership stake to the employees that serve you, the public? One thing that we have learned in the service business is that we are in business to serve our customers and the only reason a business exists is because of customers—nothing else is more important. We believe that with employee owners, we all win in our service to the community. I cannot emphasize enough how important the current employees of the MTC are to the future success of this venture. To conclude, there is currently no local ownership in MTC and, as long as Verizon owns MTC, there will not be local ownership.

4. As to the Governor’s next concern in his letter date March 9, 2004, he states “the FCC order which applies to off island traffic of MTC leaves many questions unanswered.”

For anyone who has read the order—available on the FCC website at www.fcc.gov; search for PTI—you will read a document that looks at the Federal policies and then answers the

questions posed by the Governor and other members of the public and explains in detail the relevant findings. The important thing to remember is that FCC regulates the telecommunications industry throughout the United States and they investigate these types of transactions as a regular course of business. There are more lawyers and technical experts in the FCC than can be found anywhere else in the world. The Department of Homeland Security and the Department of the Treasury (CFIUS) and the Department of Justice vetted PTI and there were no findings that supported all of the claims made by public comment. In the finish, PTI was given approval to purchase MTC.

5. Finally, the Governor’s last concern, “Eliminate the unlawful interisland charge and ensuring compliance with CNMI local law.”

We have pledged and are committed to addressing interisland toll, which has been a contentious issue for the past seven years. Currently Verizon sees it one way and the CNMI government sees it another way and there has been no resolution. We have publicly stated that we will work with CTC to come to a meaningful resolution to the interisland toll charges quickly and I state here for the record that we will have closure to this issue within the first 60 days of taking over this business from Verizon.

I hope that I have adequately answered all of the Governor’s questions and pledge to all of you our customers that we are a CNMI incorporated company that is committed to being a strong community partner and the best phone company in the Western Pacific. We are hopeful for a good outcome on Friday and look forward to owning a significant and important growth engine of the CNMI.

Just to recap

1. Islacom explanation. Done.
2. Rate Integration. Competition rules rates.
3. Local Ownership – none today – with PTI 10 percent employee ownership.
4. The FCC – there is no more competent authority in the U.S.
5. Interisland Toll – a fix within 60 days.

If the Governor is true to his written word of March 9th 2004, as he states, “Once these questions are fully explored and answered, we will all support this transaction.” Does this letter and the detailed information compiled by the FCC, and the CTC help get you onboard? Yesterday the entire legislature supported the deal. Mr. Governor, isn’t it time?

Ricardo J. Delgado Jr.

Pacific Telecom Inc.

AG

From Page 1

Lemons Jr., who heads the AGO’s anti-corruption arm, and CNMI chief prosecutor David Hutton filed the criminal charges at the Superior Court yesterday. Torres is facing five counts each of misconduct in public office, conspiracy to commit theft, conspiracy to commit theft by deception and illegal use of public supplies, services, time and personnel.

The AGO lodged five counts each of the last three offenses against Sablan. Additionally, the prosecutors filed five counts each of theft, theft by deception and receiving stolen property against her.

Ada faces four counts each of conspiracy to commit theft and conspiracy to commit theft by deception, and illegal use of public supplies, services, time and personnel.

Lemons and Hutton accused Torres and the two legislative staff of “condoning and facilitating the receipt of money by an employee [Sablan] who was in fact not performing any function that would entitle her to wages to be paid from the coffers of the Commonwealth treasury.”

Sablan allegedly received the first government check numbered 410066 in the amount of \$461.54, between June 15 and 28. She allegedly received government check no. 412493 in the amount of \$1,384.63 between June 29 and July 12; check nos. 414911 and 417358 both amounting to \$1,538.48, between July 13 and 26 and July 27 and Aug. 9, respectively; and check no. 427140 in the amount of \$461.54, between Sept. 7 and 20.

OPA criminal investigator Richard Lamkin earlier accused Torres of employing Sablan as a ghost employee, who allegedly received CNMI paychecks via

direct deposit to the Bank of Guam and the First Hawaiian Bank.

“Investigation reveals that Dorothy Sablan has been paid for at least 280 hours of work recorded as if she was on-island even though she was off-island without being on administrative, annual or sick leave time,” Lamkin said, adding that Sablan had also unlawfully received government monies pertaining to 16 hours of holiday pay.

Investigation cited by Lamkin showed that Sablan applied for a refund of her retirement contributions on March 4, 2003. She resigned from her post as Torres’ office manager three days later. On March 19, Torres rehired her to work under the same position until Sept. 30. The Retirement Fund had approved and prepared a retirement refund check for Sablan on March 28 in the amount of \$8,418.03.

More than two months after

her husband left the CNMI, Sablan left the islands with her three children via Northwest Airlines flight NW075 in the afternoon of June 24. She reportedly flew to Seattle, Washington.

“At this time, Dorothy Sablan had accumulated approximately 131 hours of annual leave time and 293 hours of sick leave time,” Lamkin said. “[She] did not return to the CNMI until Wednesday, Sept. 10,2003.”

Lamkin said the probe stemmed from an anonymous telephone call made to the OPA last August 20, just days after the sentencing of former senator Ricardo S. Atalig to 63 months in prison for involvement in a ghost employee scheme.

Lamkin said the caller tipped that Sablan was receiving full-time pay as if she was working in the CNMI, even if she had spent the previous two months in Seattle.

Besides Atalig, former

CNMI Sen. Jose M. Dela Cruz is also in federal incarceration for his involvement in the fraudulent scheme involving the hiring of ghost employees.

Lamkin’s investigation, submitted in the form of an

affidavit to the Superior Court, became the basis for the issuance of a search warrant on Torres’ offices last December. OPA and AGIU operatives raided Torres’ offices at the Legislature last Dec. 11 to the congressman’s surprise.

ARRIVALS

From Page 1

The Japan market remained strong, with 34,752 tourists visiting the islands. The figure reflects a 9-percent growth than Feb. 2003’s 31,910.

Air arrivals from Tokyo remained stable at 18,366, although the figure slightly declined by 3 percent. Arrivals from Osaka and Nagoya increased by 17 and 55 percent last month, respectively. Tourists originating from Osaka reached 6,030, while those from Nagoya totaled 5,091.

Except for the 330-air arrivals from Hokkaido, the number of tourists originating from other Japanese places increased. These places of origin include Sendai, Fukuoka, Hiroshima, Shikoku and Okinawa.

Besides Japan, only the U.S. and the Philippines performed positively last month among the CNMI’s tourist markets. The U.S. contributed 553 visitors, higher

by 14 percent than Feb. 2003’s 487; the Philippines had 349, which reflected a 23-percent improvement.

Korean arrivals slid by 3 percent, with 6,424 visitors. China, Hong Kong and Taiwan nosedived by 41, 51 and 60 percent, respectively.

Chinese visitors for the month only reached 1,435, over a thousand lower than Feb. 2003’s 2,436. Only 42 Taiwanese tourists came to the CNMI last month. Visitors from Hong Kong totaled 139, but the figure was lower than Feb. 2003’s 281 total.

Guam’s 1,409-total declined by 8 percent compared to the 1,524 visitors who came to the CNMI during the same month last year.

The MVA has been positive about CNMI’s tourism recovery before 2003 ended. Over 455,000 tourists visited the CNMI in 2003, greater than 2001’s total that suffered in the aftermath of the 9/11 terrorist attacks in the U.S.

CUC

From Page 1

CUC budget officer Betty Terlaje said the cut was necessary to ensure a balanced budget.

She said the utility firm projects to generate \$68.5 million from its collections and \$1.6 million from “additional funds.”

She said the CUC projects to generate nearly \$5 million from residential and commercial customers a month.

CUC’s “balanced budget” projection is also based on the premise that the central government would be paying at least \$800,000 a month.

The central government is currently behind in meeting its expected minimum monthly payment. CUC said the government needs to pay a total of \$1.9 million to make its account current.

From October 2003 to January 2004, the government’s payments totaled only \$2.1

million since it could only pay an average of \$500,000 a month to CUC.

Meantime, the CUC’s 2005 budget includes \$39 million for power generation, \$3.5 million for the power division, \$3.4 million for the water division, and \$1.8 million for the wastewater division.

The new budget allots \$3.2 million for Rota, \$9.1 million for Tinian, and \$486,804 for the Board of Directors.

The office of the executive director gets \$1.9 million; administration office, \$2.8 million; and comptroller’s office, \$4.8 million.

The administration office includes compliance and safety, customer services, electronic data processing, and radio control and maintenance.

The executive director’s office also covers corporate communications, human resources, legal office, and network planning and engineering.

PSS

From Page 1

FY04 obligation documents.”

Benavente and Inos said that PSS has almost \$580,000 in vendor payments “derived from FY 2004 obligations that are awaiting payment.”

“For FY 2003 and 2004, we have processed checks or have billings from vendors amounting to \$1,136,000,” said the officials.

They asked the governor to instruct the Department of Finance to release the needed amount to restore the PSS’ ability to have its purchase orders accepted by its local vendors.

They said that many of PSS on-island vendors either refuse, or are reluctant to accept purchase orders.

“We recognize there are financial constraints faced by the

government but the PSS must have cash behind the budget allocations given,” they said.

The PSS continues to get a \$37.2 million annual appropriation, which has been its funding level since 1996.

PSS said it receives the budget allotment for personnel in a timely manner, but not the additional cash transfer needed to make payments to vendors.

PSS said that these debts with vendors “are generated on behalf of the children of the CNMI.”

Further, PSS officials noted that if operating cash were being equally prorated across fiscal years, PSS would be entitled to a cash infusion of about \$1.3 million.

“This means that our rate of expenditure for operations is essentially in balance with our annual appropriation,” they said.

House sets Rota session

The House of Representatives is on recess until March 24, when it is expected to enter into its first Covenant Day holiday session on Rota.

Vice Speaker Timothy P. Villagomez has advised all members and staff to make the necessary travel arrangements to ensure their timely presence and participation in the session.

The proceedings will take place at the Northern Marianas College, Rota campus beginning 9am.

The House, during a session yesterday, adopted a total of five

PNG minister probed for rape

PORT MORESBY, Papua New Guinea (The National/PIR)—The Papua New Guinea Ombudsman Commission is investigating the alleged abduction and rape of a young woman by a government minister.

Chief Ombudsman Ila Geno confirmed this yesterday but refused to give further details.

Regarding other cases, he said Rural Development Bank managing director Wai Kitts was also under investigation.

Kitts had created a controversy by boarding a Singapore-bound flight carrying a gun.

He was supposed to have been part of the delegation that accompanied Prime Minister Sir Michael Somare during recent trip to China.

Geno said there was clearly an issue as to whether Kitts has endangered or diminished respect for and confidence in the integrity of the government of PNG contrary to Section 27(1)(d) of the Constitution.

Morobe Governor Luther Wenge also appeared before the commission yesterday to explain his remarks where he urged the physical removal of Australians engaged under the aid enhancement programme in Morobe.

Geno said Wenge’s action was a matter of concern to the Commission.

He said if a leader says or does anything to incite violence against any section of the community, it could amount to misconduct in office.

“I have formally written to Mr. Wenge to express my concern. Wenge has attended the Ombudsman Commission and given his side of the story,” Geno said, adding the Commission would consider Wenge’s response.

He said the Commission was also conducting preliminary inquires on NCDC City Manager Bernard Kipit, who stood down from the management after a staff member blew the whistle on him.

bills and two resolutions, including HJR 14-9, which asks the Commonwealth Telecommunication Commission’s expedited approval of the Verizon/Micronesian Telecommunications Corp. purchase by Pacific Telecom Inc.

House members agreed with the Senate’s amendments to HJR 14-9, which essentially sought PTI’s commitment for longer job security for existing MTC employees and the resolution to the inter-island tolls issue with the local exchange carrier.

Members, however, rejected the Senate’s amendment to HB

14-62 or the measure appropriating \$1.8 million for public school classrooms and Headstart centers.

The House apparently objected to the Senate’s insertion of the word “reprogramming” in one portion of the bill.

Speaker Benigno R. Fitial instructed Ways and Means Chairman Norman S. Palacios to confer with the upper chamber, through a conference committee, about the amendment.

HB 14-62 is a funding measure appropriating \$1.86 million mainly to alleviate overcrowding in Kagman public schools.

The bill, offered by Rep. Ramon Tebuteb, distributes the money among the following projects:

- \$692,220 for additional classrooms, among others, at

Kagman Elementary School;

- \$620,405 for more classrooms, among others, at Kagman High School;
- \$147,375 for the CNMI’s share under the DHHS Administration for Children and Families Assistance Award for the construction of the Garapan Headstart Center;
- \$200,000 for more Tinian Headstart Center classrooms;
- \$200,000 for more Rota Headstart Center classrooms.

(*Marian A. Maraya*)

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Pacific nations to discuss union

PORT MORESBY, Papua New Guinea (PNG Post-Courier/PIR)— Pacific island countries will meet in New Zealand next month to consider adopting a regional airline and a single currency and monetary policy.

The move is part of an Australian proposal to set up a regional block of nations to be called the “Pacific Union”.

The proposal could fuel new debate in Papua New Guinea, where some members of parliament have raised sovereignty concerns over the government’s decision to allow Australian officers to work in core government departments under the Australia-Papua New Guinea Enhanced Co-operation Program (ECP)

Diplomatic sources in Port Moresby said the move was part of plans by Australia and New Zealand to bring stability into the region in light of developmental hiccups and lack of good governance practices in Pacific states.

It is understood the eminent persons group reviewing the Pacific Islands Forum (PIF), which has among its member former PNG prime minister Sir Julius Chan, have backed a proposal put forward by the Australian Government to merge

key services in the region, including shipping and airline services.

Australian newspaper The Age on Monday reported New Zealand Prime Minister Helen Clark agreeing to increase funding to the PIF in order to achieve a greater regional role.

The newspaper reported that Pacific islands in the long term would adopt the Australian dollar and the states progressively “ceding” their sovereignty to a Pacific Union.

A Government spokesman yesterday said Prime Minister Michael Somare had not received formal advice of next month’s meeting from the PIF chair and Ms Clark.

He said there was nothing new about establishing a regional transport system, including an airline and a shipping service, as these were formally discussed and endorsed by regional leaders last August at the 34th Pacific Islands Forum in Auckland, New Zealand.

However, he said the adoption of the Australian dollar and a single monetary policy were not part of last year’s discussions.

The debate on Pacific Island states adopting the Australian dollar has been ongoing in recent years, with regional figures and academics advocating the adoption of the Australian dollar as the regional currency.

Teacher faces raps for alleged assault of 15-year-old student

A teacher is facing criminal charges for allegedly assaulting a 15-year-old student.

The Attorney General’s Office lodged two counts of assault and battery and a count of disturbing the peace against James C. Burgess, a teacher at the Kagman High School.

CNMI chief prosecutor David Hutton said the teacher and the boy had heated altercation that led to physical contact.

The incident allegedly happened last Feb. 9. The AGO filed the charges against Burgess at the Superior Court yesterday. *(John Ravelo)*



Fiji ministers scarce at provincial meetings

SUVA, Fiji (Radio Fiji/PIR)— The Ministry of Fijian Affairs is taking steps to improve the attendance of government officials at provincial council meetings in the 14 provinces.

Prime Minister and Fijian Affairs Minister Laisenia Qarase was responding to concerns raised by the Namosi Provincial Council on the non-attendance of government divisional advisers in their recent meeting.

Qarase admitted there is a problem in the Ministry of Fijian Affairs in trying to get government officials attend provincial council meetings.

The Prime Minister has vowed to resolve the issue.

The PM is expected to direct his Ministry to give advance notices of provincial council meetings and itineraries to all Ministries so that they have time to prepare.

Fiji medical association objects to Indian doctors

SUVA, Fiji (FijiSUN/PIR)— The Fiji Prime Minister’s Office has received a petition from the Fiji Medical Association arguing against the hiring of doctors from India.

This was confirmed by the chief executive officer in the Prime Minister’s Office, Jioji Kotobalavu, who said the petition is being looked at.

It is understood the FMA raised several issues, including

the qualifications of these expatriate doctors.

Another concern was the fact that most of these doctors were specialists and hiring them could deprive locals of their jobs.

Eleven doctors from India have been hired by the government to come and work here

In an earlier interview last year, former permanent secretary for Health Luke Rokovada said they opted to hire doctors from India because of their advance training and the fact they were specialized doctors.

But the FijiSUN was reliably informed that the hiring of the Indian doctors was based on low pay.

FMA president Dr Mary Schramm would not elaborate on the petition but indicated that it had been given to the PM’s office.

Commissioner probes police in Fiji coup

SUVA, Fiji (Radio Fiji/PIR)— Fiji Commissioner of Police Andrew Hughes has set up a committee to investigate police officers for involvement in the 2000 coup and other offences.

The committee is made up of senior police officers.

Hughes says so far 20 officers have been identified.

“We do it on a case by case basis because by the end of the day we are talking about people involved,” Hughes said. “But it is the integrity of the force that is number one. We are going through each case one by one so that we can be fair and balance the expectations in the community.”

100 Fiji military apply as UN bodyguards

SUVA, Fiji (Radio Fiji/PIR)— Fiji has submitted 100 applications to the United Nations

from soldiers who have applied for the posts of guards for UN personnel around the world.

The UN had invited applications from members of the Fiji military.

The world body is putting together units of personal bodyguards for its staff assigned to war torn areas around the world.

Republic of Fiji Military Forces Commander Land Force Colonel Ioane Naivalurua has just returned from New York where he delivered the applications.

UN officials are expected to conduct the screening of applicants before recruitment is officially carried out.

Tiny Marshalls atoll seeks nuke compensation

MELBOURNE, Australia (Radio Australia/PIR)—A tiny atoll in the northern Marshall Islands has filed a claim for nuclear test compensation and health care funding.

Ailuk Atoll, which the United States says was not significantly exposed to nuclear test fallout, has lodged a case for compensation with the Nuclear Claims Tribunal in Majuro.

Ailuk Islanders say they have experienced severe health problems, including a high rate of miscarriages and stillbirths among women

They say the problems are a result of living in a radioactive environment since the Bravo hydrogen bomb test at Bikini fifty years ago.

Radio New Zealand International reports the tribunal has already paid out more than 1 billion US dollars in hardship, loss of compensation and nuclear cleanup funding to Bikini and Enewatak atolls.

Similar claims from Rongelap and Utrik are to be settled.

dial rent

JOETEN
+BLUE

SCS student tops math competition

A student from the Saipan Community School took top individual honors in the recently held Chapter MATHCOUNTS competition at the Chacha Oceanview Junior High School.

Soo Ji Ha was the top winner in the individual category of the competition that was held last Saturday, Feb. 28.

The remaining top 10 individuals was comprised of Calvary Christian Academy's Andrew Kakuse; Marianas Baptist Academy's Roger Lee, Jae Wan Kim, Titania Cho, En Yang Pang and their coach, Ramiro H. Trinidad.

The State Competition will be held on March 20, 2004, which will determine who will represent the CNMI at the National Championships in Washington, DC in May 2004.

Each school will now select eight students to advance to the Commonwealth Championship on March 20th. The top four students from the Commonwealth Championship will go on to the National Championship in Washington, D.C.

CNMI MATHCOUNTS is administered by EFC Engineers & Architects with the support of the U.S. National Society of Professional Engineers.

The organizers expressed its thanks to the sponsors that supported this year's program: Chong's Corp., Rep. Ramon Tebuteb, Deloitte & Touche Tohmatsu, Joeten Charitable Foundation, Mobil Oil Marianas, Saipan Garment Manufacturing Association, Saipan Shipping Company, Subway Investments Corp. and UMDAdeux, Inc.

The program is still in need of additional funds and volunteers for this year. Anyone interested in helping out, or if a company can assist financially, contact CNMI MATHCOUNTS at (phone) 322-7814 or (fax) 322-6044.



CONTRIBUTED PHOTO
Japanese tourist Kobayashi Kentaro became richer by \$19,036.52 after hitting the jackpot in the early morning of March 9 on a Liberty Seven Aristocrat video-reel machine included in the 25-cent Slot Progressive pool.

Tourist wins \$19K jackpot

A three-day Jackpot Extravaganza happened at Tinian Dynasty Hotel & Casino's Electronic Gaming machines from March 7 to 9, 2004. There were three winners of four progressive jackpots.

A Paradise Slot Club Elite member and a Tinian resident won, for a third time this year, on the 5-Bet Video Poker Progressive. She hit the jackpot amount of \$1,399.87 on her favorite White Hot Aces machine in the late afternoon of March 7.

The casino then had a back-to-back winner. This 39-year-old gentleman from Japan hit the 5-Bet Video Poker Progressive twice in a row. Early evening of March 7, he won \$1,260.09 and after midnight, \$1,284.69, both on two different Joker's Wild Poker machines.

To top this all off, Kobayashi Kentaro, a Japanese tourist, became richer by \$19,036.52. He hit the jackpot in the early morning of March 9 on a Liberty Seven Aristocrat video-reel machine included in the 25-cent Slot Progressive pool.

Tinian Dynasty Hotel & Casino's \$5,000 Dollar-Slot Progressive is eager to give away its \$29,200-plus jackpot. A \$2 maximum bet will give anyone the chance to win this growing jackpot.

The 20-Bet Video Poker Progressive Jackpot now reads \$8,200-plus.

On April 3, 2004, Saturday, join the Chamorro Pride Video Poker tournament. For participants, special prizes for beer and island music.

For any tournament reservations or inquiries, contact Electronic Gaming Department, tel. (670) 328-2233 extension 2814 or e-mail tdc.egm@vzpacifica.net.

KES to start registration

Koblerville Elementary School will begin registration for the 2004-05 school year soon. The following documents are required for each student to register:

- Up-to-date registration form
- Birth certificate
- Insurance card
- Hospital number
- Up-to-date health clearance
- Map to the house
- Guardianship papers if not residing with parents named on birth certificate
- Withdrawal form from previous school if entering grade two or above

Students who currently attend KES will receive a list of which documents in their file need to be updated on Monday, March 29. Parents and guardians are asked to provide the necessary documents for ongoing registration by Thursday, April 8.

Registration for new students will begin on Monday, April 19. Parents of students who will be attending kindergarten are encouraged to enroll promptly as only forty spaces (1am and 1pm class) are available. All supporting documents must be complete in order to reserve a slot.

The school thanks parents for their timely registration as the school bases its staffing pattern on projected enrollment.

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Nation

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Nation

Teen sniper sentenced to life in prison

By ADRIENNE SCHWISOW
AP WRITER

CHESAPEAKE, Va. (AP)—Lee Boyd Malvo, the young man who teamed up with John Allen Muhammad to terrorize the Washington area in a sniper spree that left 10 people dead, was formally sentenced Wednesday to life in prison without parole.

Malvo, 19, was sentenced a day after Muhammad was given the death penalty by a judge in nearby Prince William County. The judge in Muhammad's case could have reduced the sentence to life in prison, but Malvo's judge had no other option than

life without parole, which the jury recommended.

Malvo, wearing a gray sweater, light blue shirt and dark trousers, did not speak during the 10-minute hearing, following the advice of his lawyers who did not want his words used against him in future prosecutions.

Prosecutor Paul Ebert, who led the case against Muhammad and is next in line to try Malvo, said he would wait until the U.S. Supreme Court rules on whether juveniles may be executed. A decision is expected next year.

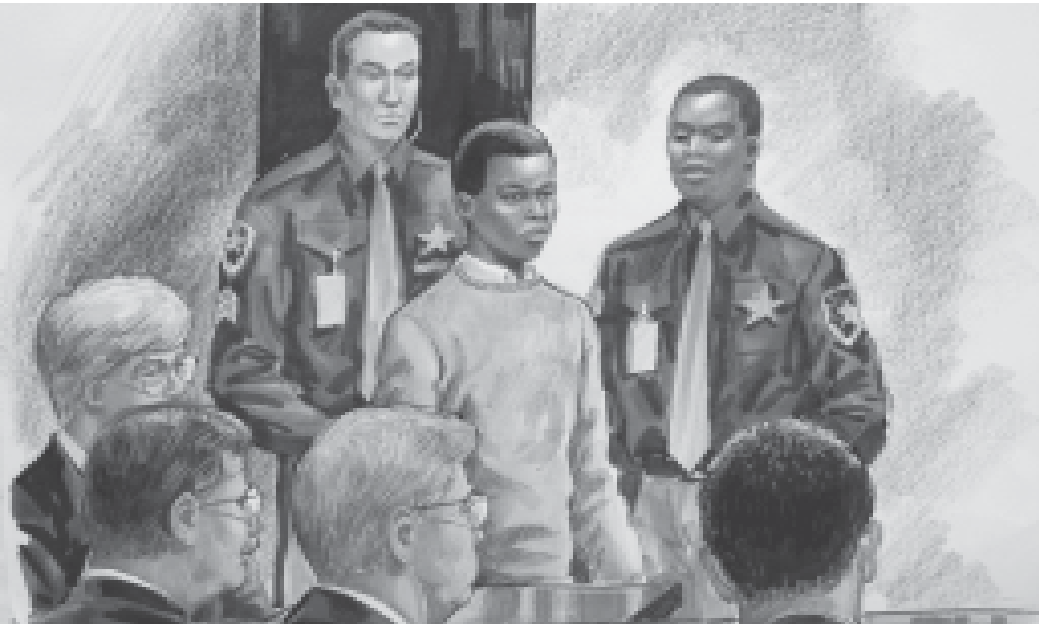
Malvo was 17 when he killed FBI analyst Linda Franklin, 47, outside a Falls

Church Home Depot store.

"If the Supreme Court rules that the death penalty is still available to juveniles, I will try Mr. Malvo and very likely seek the death penalty," Ebert said. He added that a trial would not take place until next year, at the earliest.

Robert F. Horan Jr., who led the prosecution of Malvo, said after sentencing that he plans to try Muhammad in the killing of Franklin. He said the trial could take place by the end of the summer.

Muhammad's attorneys are appealing his conviction in the Oct. 9, 2002, killing of Dean Harold Meyers, and Horan said



Convicted sniper Lee Boyd Malvo is led into court for his sentencing in Chesapeake Circuit Court in Chesapeake, Va., Wednesday March 10, 2004.

another conviction would serve as a backup if the first one is reversed.

Malvo's attorneys argued during the trial that the teenager was legally insane because he was brainwashed by Muhammad, whom he considered his father. Jurors have said that while they did not believe Malvo was insane, they thought Muha-

mmad had influenced him.

Defense lawyer Craig Cooley reiterated Wednesday that Muhammad was an influence.

"We do not believe anyone could have observed the evidence ... and believed Lee Malvo would be here except for the influence of John Muhammad," Cooley said.

Malvo attorney Michael Arif said after the hearing that Malvo

is still in the process of realizing what he has done.

"He's cried on occasion, but hasn't yet come to appreciate the entirety of what has happened to the victims," Arif said.

Prosecutors in other states, including Alabama and Louisiana, are seeking Malvo's extradition to face potential death-penalty charges for killings there.

Terror alerts need fine-tuning

WASHINGTON (AP)—The government is failing to adequately notify local authorities to changes in the nation's terror alert level, according to a preliminary congressional report obtained by The Associated Press.

Lawmakers asked for the report from the General Accounting Office because they are concerned that the color-coded terror alert system is not effective.

"The general alert system only numbs the American people to the threats we face," said Moira Whelan, a spokeswoman for Rep. Jim Turner of Texas, the top Democrat on the Select Committee for Homeland Security.

The five color-coded

warning system was introduced in March 2002. It has been raised five times to the second-highest level—orange, or high—from yellow, or elevated.

The report said eight federal, state and local government agencies, from among the two dozen surveyed by congressional investigators, learned about threat level changes through the media.

"This raises questions about whether the Department of Homeland Security is always conveying information regarding threat level changes to government entities expeditiously," the report said.

It recommended that the department define clear channels

of communication to make sure other agencies understand its priorities and operations.

The methods now used include conference calls between Homeland Security Secretary Tom Ridge and state officials; telephone calls or e-mails to federal, state or local agencies; and electronic systems used by the department and the FBI.

Homeland Security spokesman Brian Roehrkasse said the department does have set ways of alerting local authorities "in a very timely fashion."

The report also said the department lacks written standards for assessing intelligence and determining whether to change the warning level.

NTSB probes Baltimore water taxi deaths

BALTIMORE (AP)—As the skies west of Baltimore's Inner Harbor darkened, Francis Deppner got a call to bring his water taxi to shore.

The captain radioed back that he was turning around, but the pontoon boat was still hundreds of feet out when a powerful gust flipped it over, dumping all 25 people into the cold water. Five died and three of them remained missing Wednesday in the 50-foot-deep channel.

No single factor has been blamed for Saturday's accident, but many questions have arisen: When and how was the weather warning received? Did

Deppner tell passengers to don life jackets? Was the craft's design to blame?

And—most critically—could it be a hint of problems with water taxis also used in Boston, New York, Chicago and Fort Lauderdale, Fla.?

"We're always trying to see, is this something that is more far-reaching?" said Lauren Peduzzi, spokeswoman for the National Transportation Safety Board. "Is there something that is more systemic that we need to look at?"

Baltimore's two water taxi companies have no single method of tracking deadly storms like the one packing 55 mph winds that

capsized the Lady D, operated by Seaport Taxi. The companies watch different weather forecasts, let captains decide when boats should turn back, and use private radio channels to talk to their fleets.

Ed Kane's Water Taxi in Baltimore pulled its boats from the historic harbor just before the accident. But it did not warn rival Seaport Taxi of bad weather, said David Jankowiak, a vice president.

"They don't listen to us and we wouldn't listen to them, either," Jankowiak said. "It's like a competitor more or less—it's like Kmart and Wal-Mart."

grace christian

Assisted suicide ticks upward in Oregon

PORTLAND, Ore. (AP)—Physician-assisted suicide increased slightly in 2003 in Oregon, the only state that allows doctors to prescribe a lethal dose of drugs to terminally ill patients, according to a report released Wednesday.

Forty-two terminally ill patients killed themselves last year under the assisted-suicide law, said the report by the Oregon Department of Human Services. It was an increase of about 10 percent from 2002, when 38 people committed suicide legally.

“This is an increase, but the number remains small in comparison to the average 31,000 Oregon deaths every year,” said Dr. Mel Kohn, the state epidemiologist.

The assisted-suicide law allows terminally ill patients with less than six months to live to request a lethal dose of drugs after two doctors confirm the diagnosis and judge the patient mentally competent to make the request.

Supporters of the law say Wednesday’s report shows it is working as intended.

“Few assisted deaths, no substantial complications—more evidence of a safe, careful medical practice,” said Barbara Coombs Lee, the author of the law and president of Compassion in Dying.

Gov. John Kitzhaber, a physician, signed the law in 1998. Since then, at least 133 people have used the law to end their lives.

Unfunded programs cost states \$29B

By **ROBERT TANNER**
AP NATIONAL WRITER

It’s an old gripe, but one with an increasingly large price tag: States say they’re now paying at least \$29 billion for programs that Washington launched but did not fully fund—including education, prescription drugs, homeland security and more.

Similar complaints a decade ago spurred a federal law reining in the practice. But loopholes mean the buck is being passed more and more, state leaders said Wednesday as they called on the Bush administration and Congress to use the federal budget to set things right.

“It feels like the late 1980s and ’90s

all over again,” said Utah House Speaker Marty Stephens, a Republican and president of the National Conference of State Legislatures. “States’ own budget programs and priorities are being supplanted by federal spending priorities.”

But watchdogs in Congress and others have questioned whether states overhype allegations of so-called unfunded mandates, noting that many programs are voluntary.

A report released Wednesday from the NCSL, a bipartisan group of state lawmakers, said the \$29.7-billion estimate was conservative, and the total could be as much as three times higher. It accounted for 6 percent of states’ total general fund spending. Costs include:

- \$10 billion for special education programs.
 - \$9.6 billion for No Child Left Behind.
 - \$6 billion for prescription drugs for Medicare-eligible patients.
 - \$1 billion for environmental regulations.
- The costs are expected to rise to \$34.2 billion next year, the report found.
- “States can ill afford to shoulder this burden,” Stephens said. “During a time of fiscal crisis, it’s unbearable.”
- A 1995 federal law sought to put an end to unfunded mandates. Its success has been eroded in recent years, the report found, through loopholes that include exemptions to the law, conditions placed on federal grants to

states, and the failure of Congress to fully fund the laws its passes.

Not everyone agrees that the problem is as widespread as states claim.

The Congressional Budget Office, charged by Congress under the same 1995 Unfunded Mandate Reform Act to assess the impact of federal policy on the states, reported in July that only two laws passed in the last seven years imposed costs of more than \$50 million on states. They were a 1996 increase in the minimum wage and a 1997 decrease in spending on food stamps.

The report specifically found that Bush’s No Child Left Behind law and an older special education law are voluntary programs, and aren’t technically mandates.

Uncertain cost of Iraq war has some wary

WASHINGTON (AP)—Pressed to estimate the cost of future operations in Iraq, the Pentagon has repeatedly said it’s just too hard to do. Now the ranks of disbelievers are growing—in Congress and among private defense analysts. Some say the Bush administration’s refusal to estimate costs could erode American support for the Iraq campaign, as well as the credibility of the White House and lawmakers.

“It is crucial that we have every bit of information so we can level with the taxpayer,” Democratic Rep. David Obey of Wisconsin fumed recently at Defense Secretary Donald H. Rumsfeld. “We don’t have that information now.”

“The White House plays hide and seek with the costs of the war,” said Sen. Robert Byrd, D-W.Va.

The object of their ire is President Bush’s proposed defense spending for the budget year beginning Oct. 1—a \$402 billion request that didn’t include money for the major military operations in Iraq and Afghanistan.

And it’s not just Democrats who disagree with the administration’s approach.

Republican chairmen of the House and Senate budget committees penciled in tens of billions of dollars for the two military campaigns in spending plans they began pushing through Congress this week.

Asked at a recent congressional hearing why costs for Iraq were not included in the Bush administration’s budget, Pentagon comptroller Dov Zakheim replied: “Because we simply cannot predict them.”

Yet many contend the administration at least knows that roughly 100,000 soldiers will remain in Iraq for another year, and could have budgeted an estimate or a placeholder request for that.

“We know it will not be free,” said Steve Kosiak of the Center for Strategic and Budgetary Assessments.

Private and congressional analysts, in fact, have done a number of studies

and projections of possible costs:

- Daniel Goure of the conservative Lexington Institute said he expects troop levels to gradually drop over five years to one-half or one-third the present deployment—meaning 30,000 to 50,000 Americans troops could remain in Iraq through 2009.
- The Congressional Budget Office a few months ago estimated the cost to occupy Iraq through 2013 at up to \$200 billion, depending on troops levels.
- Casualties could rise to at least 1,000, said a recent report by Anthony Cordesman of the Center for Strategic and International Studies, a frequent Pentagon adviser.

dial rent

Demand for cadavers fuels illegal trade

By ROBERT JABLON
AP WRITER

LOS ANGELES (AP)—A corpse-selling scandal at UCLA has underlined a squeamish fact for people thinking of leaving their remains to science: Bodies are big money. And not only that, but some aspects of the industry are virtually unregulated.

On Tuesday, the University of California at Los Angeles, which receives an average of 175 donated corpses a year, agreed to a court order to stop accepting such cadavers until an investigation is completed into allegations that two men, including the director of the university’s Willd Body Program, sold body parts on the side for their own profit.

Director Henry Reid and

Ernest V. Nelson, who is not a UCLA employee, were arrested over the weekend. The Los Angeles Times reported that it was shown invoices on a UCLA letterhead indicating 496 cadavers were sold for a total of \$704,600 between 1998 and 2003. One client was pharmaceutical giant Johnson & Johnson.

The company said a subsidiary called Mitek obtained tissue from Nelson in the 1990s, but added, “Mitek did not knowingly receive samples that may have been obtained in an inappropriate way.”

“We take the matter of using human tissue samples for medical research and education very seriously. We are sensitive to the need that all samples are appropriately and properly obtained, stored

and shipped,” Johnson & Johnson said in a statement.

Donated cadavers and the corneas, tendons, skin and other parts taken from them are in high demand for transplants, medical training and research by universities and companies. Experts say the U.S. human tissue industry is worth hundreds of millions of dollars a year.

“It’s a wild, wild West out there in tissue land, with few sheriffs and a lot of shady characters meeting in the back rooms,” said Dr. Art Caplan, a professor of bioethics at the University of Pennsylvania.

Demand always outstrips supply. Each year, about 20,000 bodies are donated and about 1 million transplants involving human tissue are performed, said Bob Rigney, chief executive of

the American Association of Tissue Banks, which has 83 members banks. He estimated that both donations and demand are increasing by 5 percent to 10 percent annually.

Tendons and ligaments are used to treat sports injuries, long bones to replace those eaten away by cancer, shaped bone products for spinal surgery, ground bone in dental surgery. Cadavers supply corneas and heart valves; help medical students learn anatomy; give surgeons practice in cutting, stitching and other operating techniques; and have even served as crash-test dummies. Cadaver collagen finds its way into people’s lips.

Heart valves can fetch \$5,000 to \$7,000 each. Skin, used to dress the wounds of burn victims, can go for \$1,000 a

Donated bodies used in tests on land mine

NEW ORLEANS (AP)—Seven cadavers donated to Tulane University’s medical school were sold to the Army and blown up in land mine experiments, officials said Wednesday. Tulane said it has suspended dealings with a national distributor of donated bodies.

Tulane receives up to 150 cadavers a year from donors but needs only between 40 and 45 for classes, said Mary Bitner Anderson, co-director of the Tulane School of Medicine’s Willd Body Program.

The university paid National Anatomical Service, a New York-based company that distributes bodies nationwide, less than \$1,000 a body to deliver surplus cadavers, thinking they were going to medical schools in need of corpses.

The anatomical services company sold seven cadavers to the Army for between \$25,000 and \$30,000, said Chuck Dasey, a spokesman for the Army’s Medical Research and Materiel Command in Fort Detrick, Md. The bodies were blown up in tests on protective footwear against land mines at Fort Sam Houston in San Antonio.

Tulane said it found out about the Army’s use of the bodies in January 2003. It suspended its contract with the anatomical services company this month. The company did not immediately return calls for comment.

“There is a legitimate need for medical research and cadavers are one of the models that help medical researchers find out valuable information,” Dasey said. “Our position is that it is a regulated process. Obviously it makes some people uncomfortable.”

Cadaver remains are routinely cremated, he added.

For years military researchers have bought cadavers to use in research involving explosive devices. In the last five years, that research has been used to help determine safe standoff distances, on how to build the best shelters, and to improve helmets, Dasey said.

Michael Meyer, a philosophy professor at Santa Clara University in California who has written about the ethics of donated bodies, said the military’s use is questionable because it knows donors did not expect to end up in land mine tests.

“Imagine if your mother had said all her life that she wanted her body to be used for science, and then her body was used to test land mines. I think that is disturbing, and I think there are some moral problems with deception here,” Meyers said.

The market in bodies and body parts is under scrutiny after two men, including the head of the Willd Body Program at the University of California at Los Angeles, were arrested for trafficking in stolen body parts.

church of christ

square foot. Brains, veins, fingernails—pretty much every part of a corpse can be valuable.

If a single body could provide all its organs, the cadaver would be worth \$150,000, Caplan said.

Latest Sept. 11 suit blames 3 nations

NEW YORK (AP)—The family of a former FBI counterterrorism chief killed in the World Trade Center collapse sued Saudi Arabia, Syria and Sudan on Wednesday, accusing them of aiding terrorists worldwide.

In two lawsuits, the wife and children of John O’Neill are seeking more than \$100 billion in damages for themselves and other survivors of those who died at the trade center, the Pentagon or on the hijacked airplanes.

The lawsuits in U.S. District Court in Manhattan are among several filed since the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attacks against countries, companies and organizations accused of aiding al-Qaida and other terrorist groups. Last year O’Neill’s family filed a lawsuit against Iraq.

The new lawsuits argue that the Sept. 11 attacks had been planned for years by a network of Islamic militants with the assistance of banks, governments and individuals.

A call for comment placed to the Royal Embassy of Saudi Arabia in Washington, D.C., went unanswered late Wednesday. Messages left with the Sudanese and Syrian missions to the United Nations were not immediately returned.

O’Neill was one of the FBI’s top terrorism experts before he left the bureau shortly before the Sept. 11 attacks amid an investigation into his loss of a briefcase with sensitive FBI documents. He became chief of security at the trade center.



Four injured after locomotive unhitches

NEW YORK (AP)—A locomotive unhitched from a parked train and crashed into five cars while rolling through crossing points Wednesday, injuring four people.

The locomotive broke loose from a freight train undergoing an engine change at a repair area in an industrial section of Queens, said Long Island Rail Road spokesman Sam Zambuto. It traveled more than a half mile before coming to a stop.

Two men were injured when the locomotive hit a car as it went through the first intersection, Zambuto said. They were hospitalized in critical condition.

The locomotive went through several city blocks before hitting a second car at another crossing. A third car was hit, but it was unclear where. Two people were hospitalized in stable condition from those crashes.

The train also hit two trucks belonging to the New York & Atlantic Railway, setting one of them on fire, Zambuto said. No one was injured in that crash.

Death of day care invader called suicide

MADISON, Wis. (AP)—A man who attacked a day care teacher with a knife before police killed him was due in court the next day on charges he kidnapped and beat his former girlfriend, officials said.

A coroner on Wednesday identified the intruder as Gregory E. Velasquez and ruled his death a suicide, saying he forced police to kill him.

Velasquez, 39, appeared to have no link to the Red Caboose Day Care Center, other than that he once worked at a business next door.

Velasquez walked into the center on Tuesday brandishing meat cleavers. He cut up teacher Gary Dosemagen, 55, before two officers arrived and shot him multiple times. Velasquez also had threatened to kill the center's director, police said.

No children were hurt.

Three students raped near Rutgers U.

NEW BRUNSWICK, N.J. (AP)—A group of men wearing ski masks burst into an apartment near the Rutgers University campus, raped three female students at gunpoint and fled, police said.

No arrests had been made in the attacks Monday, Gary Hirsch, a spokesman for Mayor James M. Cahill, said Wednesday.

The attackers were carrying a knife and a gun when they entered the ground floor apartment of a two-story house. Eight people were in the apartment when the attackers entered, including the three women who were assaulted, police said.

Authorities said the attackers also stole money and possessions, and punched a man who was in

the apartment. There were at least four attackers, police said.

Slurs broadcast over Chicago fire radios

CHICAGO (AP)—A string of racial slurs broadcast over Chicago's fire department radios has City Hall in an uproar, and the mayor is calling on firefighters to break their silence and identify the culprits.

City Council members, meanwhile, are demanding reforms to end what they say is a culture of racism in the department.

Amid the controversy, a black fire battalion chief received a death threat, and an outspoken black alderman said Wednesday that he, too, had been warned against criticizing the department.

At least five racial slurs have been heard over the department's radios since February. The firefighter accused of making the first slur Feb. 2 was given a 90-day suspension and was transferred. The department's internal affairs division is investigating the other slurs.

Hasidic village founder dies in prison

NEW SQUARE, N.Y. (AP)—Chaim Berger, one of the founders of the Hasidic Jewish village of New Square and a mastermind of the theft of millions of dollars in government subsidies, has died in a prison hospital, friends said.

Berger, 79, died Tuesday morning at the Federal Medical Center in Butner, N.C., where he was serving a six-year sentence. He was buried in New Square, in Rockland County northwest of New York City, on Tuesday night.

Rabbi Meyer Schiller, a longtime friend, said Berger had cancer.

Berger was one of five men accused of embezzling \$11.6 million from federal anti-poverty programs. He fled prosecution in 1997 but was arrested in Israel in 1998 and returned to the United States in 2001 to stand trial.

NYU student kills self in jump from roof

NEW YORK (AP)—A 19-year-old New York University student committed suicide by jumping from the roof of her boyfriend's off-campus apartment building, the fourth student from the school to die in a plunge this academic year.

Diana Chien, who transferred this semester from the University of California, Los Angeles, jumped off the roof of the 24-story building in midtown Manhattan on Saturday, police said.

The medical examiner ruled her death a suicide. Chien and her boyfriend, Christopher Lam, had a rocky relationship and Chien's death was unrelated to problems at school, police said.

Two of the four falling deaths have been ruled suicides, the first among NYU students since 1996, according to the university.

Bush, Kerry focusing on US jobs

CLEVELAND (AP)—President George W. Bush tried to deflect Democrats' attacks on his economic policies by portraying John Kerry as an advocate of higher taxes and trade barriers that are "the enemy of job creation."

Bush expressed sympathy Wednesday with economic anxieties in Ohio, a politically important state that has lost more than 200,000 jobs since he took office. The Republican captured Ohio in 2000, edging Democrat Al Gore, and this year the state looms large in any electoral calculation.

"Manufacturing commu-

nities like Youngstown and Cleveland have been hit especially hard," Bush said. "I understand that. I know there are workers here concerned about their jobs going overseas." He blamed economic problems on factors beyond his control — a recession that began after he took office, the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks and corporate scandals that he said were brewing for years.

Job losses are a major issue in the presidential campaign, and Bush and Kerry traded charges over how to respond. Without naming Kerry, Bush accused his Democratic rival

of promoting job-killing policies to raise taxes and discourage free trade.

"The old policy of economic isolationism is a recipe for economic disaster," Bush said on his 15th visit to Ohio. "Americans have moved beyond that tired, defeatist mind-set and we're not going back."

Bush made a quick tour through Thermagon Inc., a small company that makes materials that conduct and disburse heat from computers and other equipment. Kerry was in Chicago, speaking via satellite from the shop floor of a mechanical contracting business

to labor union leaders at the AFL-CIO winter convention in Florida.

"We will create new incentives to help companies create and keep new jobs here at home," said Kerry, who won the labor federation's endorsement last month and hopes to use labor's organizational muscle and money to boost his campaign. "If I'm president, our government won't provide a single reward for sending our jobs overseas, or exploiting the tax code to go to Bermuda to avoid paying taxes while sticking the American people with the bill."

triple j sedan
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Asia

Japan youth who killed two children is released

TOKYO (AP)—A youth who decapitated a boy and bludgeoned a girl to death at age 14—one of Japan’s most notorious juvenile crimes—was freed Wednesday after 6 1/2 years in a reformatory.

The killing in the western city of Kobe in 1997 stunned the country and prompted lawmakers to lower the age which juveniles could be prosecuted for crimes from 16 to 14.

The youth, now 21, never has been publicly identified by authorities. He was freed on probation from a juvenile reformatory near Tokyo after a review board decided he was no longer a threat to society, justice official Tetsuo Obata said.

The victims’ families said they were unconvinced by such reassurances, and the release could fuel debate about the way the justice system deals with minors who commit heinous crimes.

At an unusual news conference held by the Justice Ministry to announce the release, Obata said the psychiatric counseling and re-education of the youth had “born fruit.”

The announcement was a first in Japan, where legal proceedings involving minors long have been kept secret even from victims to facilitate youthful offenders’ reintegration into society.

Obata said authorities decided to notify the public of the release and explain their decision to “alleviate concern” about the case. He declined to say where the youth will live.

The youth killed two younger children and assaulted three others over a four-month period in 1997—taunting police with notes and leaving the severed head of an 11-year-old boy outside a school.

Mamoru Hase, father of Jun Hase, the slain boy, called the decision to publicize the release a “step forward” but challenged the assertion that the youth was no longer dangerous.

“I have a lot of doubts about whether he has truly reformed,” said Hase. “Six years doesn’t seem very long to me.”

The youth reportedly read letters written by the victims’ families and said he wants to pay compensation and otherwise try to make amends.



BURYING THE DEAD
Workers in protective suits walk down to the Funai poultry farm as they work to bury culled chickens at Tamba, in Kyoto prefecture, western Japan, Wednesday, March 10, 2004. Two chicken farms at Tamba have been hit by bird flu and tens of thousands of chickens at the farms were destroyed.

US defends raid that killed Afghan kids

KABUL, Afghanistan (AP)—The U.S. military insisted Wednesday it followed “appropriate” rules of engagement in a botched December airstrike that killed nine Afghan children, but won’t disclose details of an inquiry into the attack because they include top-secret intelligence.

The decision emerged the same day that an Afghan civilian died in a fierce firefight between U.S. forces and suspected Taliban fighters near a remote American base in northeast Afghanistan.

A military spokesman said the probe into the Dec. 6 attack that killed the children concluded the military had followed the rules of war properly. The attack drew criticism from the Afghan government and the United Nations.

The children were killed by an A-10 ground-attack aircraft as they played near a village in Ghazni province. A man was also killed, but the military admitted that a suspected Taliban militant targeted in the raid escaped. The military apologized after the incident.

Lt. Col. Bryan Hilferty said releasing details of the report would compromise U.S. intelligence.

“The results are classified ‘top secret’ because of the intelligence involved and the targeting involved,” Hilferty said. “You can follow all of the laws of land warfare and still, unfortunately, have tragic incidents.”

The deaths—and those of six other children in an assault on a house in neighboring Paktia province the day before—were highlighted in a report released Monday by Human Rights Watch. It accused the military of using excessive force.

The military has rejected that report, saying Human Rights Watch didn’t understand that Afghanistan is still a combat zone.

Military officials have said they modified the rules of engagement after the December attacks. They won’t give details, saying that would only help militants.



Reports: Cat sneaks on to airline flight

DHAKA, Bangladesh (AP)—A stray cat sneaked aboard a domestic Bangladesh flight and later sent airport guards on a 2-hour chase around the runway before it was caught, reports said Wednesday.

The small cat, which meowed nervously during Tuesday’s 40-minute journey from Sylhet to national capital Dhaka, was only spotted after state-run Biman airlines was airborne, Ittefaq and Bangladesh Observer dailies reported. Sylhet is 190 kilometers (120 miles) northeast of Dhaka.

The cat remained outside the cockpit and didn’t disturb any of the 45 people on board during the flight, the reports said.

When the plane landed in Dhaka, the cat slipped through the disembarking passengers at Zia International Airport and led guards on a two hour chase around the tarmac before it was caught.

Skydivers killed in jump over southern Thailand

BANGKOK, Thailand (AP)—Two veteran skydivers from Italy and Russia were killed after their parachutes became entangled and they fell to the ground during a jump over a beach in southern Thailand, police said Thursday.

The two men—Italian Antonio Depiscopo, 48, and Russian Andrey Tershukov, 32—died late Wednesday after the accident in Prachuab Khiri Khan province, about 230 kilometers (140 miles) south of Bangkok, according to police Lt. Rachapoom Kusuman and The Nation newspaper.

The victims’ hometowns were not immediately available.

The skydivers collided and their parachutes became entangled about 50 feet (15 meters) above the ground, he said, quoting witnesses.

Depiscopo suffered head injuries and died at the scene, while Tershukov died later at a

hospital from injuries including a broken arm and spine, Rachapoom said.

Report: Singapore sperm banks drying up

SINGAPORE (AP)—Singapore’s sperm banks are almost completely empty with only five men coming forward to donate last year, it was reported Wednesday. And no women gave up their eggs in 2003.

The lack of donors has forced infertile couples to wait at least two years for either a sperm or egg donation, state-owned Channel NewsAsia said on its Web site.

The Singapore government is debating ways to it can help encourage its population of 4 million to procreate after recording its lowest-ever birth rate last year, with just 37,633 babies born—far below the 50,000 a year the government is targeting.

“Many of the volunteers feel the time and effort they spend isn’t worth it,” Dr. Yeong Cheng Toh from the KK Women’s and Children’s Hospital was quoted as saying.

Report: China forest fire kills 1, injures 28

BELJING (AP)—A forest fire in southern China has killed one soldier and injured 28 other troops called in to battle the blaze that raged for three days, the official Xinhua News Agency reported Thursday.

Tan Shouwen, 22, died from fire-related injuries Tuesday, when the blaze in Xingzi county, Jiangxi province broke out, the report said. The fire was brought under control Thursday morning.

Investigators believe the fire was accidentally started by a local farmer who was burning paper as an offering to his ancestors.

Another 28 people, mostly soldiers, were injured in the blaze, and were in stable condition at local hospitals, the report said.

The peasant farmer suspected of accidentally starting the fire, Qian Muoyang, was released from jail for unknown offenses Monday and visited his father’s grave Tuesday to burn paper money as an offering, said Zhou Mufu, an official with the Xingzi County Forestry Bureau.

dpw007

World

Two Americans, translator killed in Iraq

By MATT MOORE
AP WRITER

BAGHDAD, Iraq (AP)—Gunmen disguised as police shot to death two American coalition officials and their Iraqi translator south of Baghdad after stopping their car at a roadblock, the Polish military said Wednesday. The Americans were the first U.S. civilians from the occupation authority to be killed in Iraq.

Farther south, Iraqi police clashed with a Shiite Muslim militia during a raid on a building in a gunbattle that killed four policemen and wounded two.

L. Paul Bremer, the top administrator in Iraq, has requested that the FBI investigate the slayings of the Americans late Tuesday on a road outside the town of Hillah, 35 miles south of Baghdad, said Dan Senor, spokesman for the U.S.-led coalition.

It was not known whether the gunmen were specifically targeting coalition officials. "We're starting to form views on that," Senor said.

And it was unclear if the Americans were traveling with security. Coalition guidelines discourage the movement of staffers after dark. The roads around Hillah have seen a number of attacks on vehicles, some of them fatal.

An officer with the Polish military, which patrols south-central Iraq, said the gunmen were disguised as policemen and stopped the Americans' car at a checkpoint. The attackers shot the passengers and took the vehicle, Col. Robert Strzelecki said.

Polish troops later intercepted the car, arrested five Iraqis in it and found the bodies inside, said Strzelecki, speaking from the Camp Babylon headquarters of the Polish-led multinational force in Iraq.

Senor said some reported details of the attack were incorrect, but would not elaborate. He did not identify the dead, pending notification of relatives.

The Americans, who were Defense Department employees, were the first U.S.



SSG Joseph B. Wright, center, of the Alpha Company, 2nd Brigade Combat Team, 1st Cavalry Division based in Fort Hood, Texas, conducts joint patrol with new Iraqi Civil Defense Corps around the Kazimiya Shrine in Baghdad, Iraq Wednesday March 10, 2004.

civilians from the Coalition Provisional Authority to be killed in Iraq, Senor said.

An Army colonel working for the coalition was killed Oct. 26, when insurgents fired a barrage of rockets at Baghdad's Al-Rasheed hotel while Deputy Defense Secretary Paul Wolfowitz was visiting. Fifteen people were wounded, and Wolfowitz escaped unharmed.

Civilian contractors have also been killed. Since the war began, 553 U.S. service members have died in Iraq, 379 of them from hostile action. Since May 1, when President Bush declared major combat operations in Iraq over, 264 U.S. troops have been killed by the insurgency thought to be led by Saddam Hussein loyalists or foreign fighters.

In the southern city of Nasiriyah, Iraqi police tried Tuesday night to raid a building where a Shiite militia was holding two civilians, a coalition spokesman said. In a gunbattle, four Iraqi policemen were killed and two wounded.

Iran plans to resume uranium enrichment

By ALI AKBAR DAREINI
AP WRITER

TEHRAN, Iran (AP)—Iran said Wednesday it would resume uranium enrichment and warned it may quit cooperating with the International Atomic Energy Agency, which it accused of kowtowing to Washington at a crucial meeting in Vienna.

Separately, Defense Minister Ali Shamkhani told reporters the Iranian military had built nuclear centrifuges for civilian use—the first time Iran has acknowledged its military was involved in the country's nuclear program.

IAEA Director General Mohamed ElBaradei warned that Iran risked undermining its efforts to convince the world its nuclear intentions are peaceful.

"I think suspension is ... a good confidence-building measure, and Iran needs to do everything possible right now to create the confidence required," ElBaradei said Wednesday in Vienna, Austria, where the U.N. atomic agency's board of governors was meeting.

The agency's 35-nation board of governors was preparing for a debate Thursday on whether Iran is living up to its pledge to full transparency on its nuclear program.

The United States, which suspects Iran is building nuclear arms, wants a draft resolution on Iran to take a tough line because of evidence of secrecy. But the Europeans want to acknowledge Iran has made

Chief UN nuclear inspector dismayed

VIENNA, Austria (AP)—Iran's plans to resume uranium enrichment prompted dismay from the chief U.N. nuclear inspector, who said it would hurt Tehran's chances of proving that it has no interest in nuclear weapons.

Mohamed ElBaradei, who heads the International Atomic Energy Agency, spoke with reporters after the IAEA board of governors unanimously passed a resolution Wednesday praising Libya for voluntarily scrapping its weapons program.

If Iran resumed enriching uranium, it would hurt Tehran's efforts to convince the world its nuclear intentions were peaceful, ElBaradei said.

"I think suspension is ... a good confidence-building measure, and Iran needs to do everything possible right now to create the confidence required," ElBaradei told reporters.

The vote on the Libya resolution came ahead of the tougher task of deciding how harshly to censure Iran for not being fully open with its nuclear programs. Libya also signed an agreement opening up its nuclear activities to pervasive IAEA inspections.

Ahead of debate on an Iran draft resolution, set for Thursday, Iran's chief delegate said U.S. failures in Iraq are prompting Washington to seek revenge against his country.

"We have never been involved in any nuclear weapons program ... and the Americans don't want to accept the fact," Pirouz Hosseini told reporters. "The Americans have failed in Iraq, and it seems that it will be very difficult for them to accept a second failure."

Hosseini criticized the draft resolution, saying the Americans had put "too much pressure" on the Europeans to toughen up its language.

Iran's announcement Wednesday that it would resume uranium enrichment once its problems with the IAEA are resolved threatened to further complicate matters.

United Nations, in the hopes of attracting wider support from the Europeans as well as other countries, the official said.

Iran's chief delegate to the IAEA, Pirouz Hosseini, told reporters outside the board of governors meeting that Iran was unhappy with the draft and accused the United States of putting pressure on the Europeans.

"We have never been involved in any nuclear weapons program ... and the Americans don't want to accept the fact," Hosseini said.

In Tehran, Foreign Minister Kamal Kharrazi accused the world body of failing to reciprocate.

picture of Iran's past and present nuclear program."

The draft also praised Iran for signing an agreement that granted a free hand to IAEA inspectors.

The Bush administration had hoped the current IAEA conference in Vienna would wind up with the agency referring Iran's activities to the U.N. Security Council, where economic sanctions could be imposed to punish Iran.

But the administration decided on a compromise approach that defers action at the



Shamkhani

substantial, if not complete, steps toward openness.

An American official told The Associated Press Wednesday that the United States has struck a compromise with European nations that defers a showdown with Iran at the United Nations on its nuclear programs yet deplores its failure to come clean with the IAEA.

A draft obtained by The AP said the agency noted "with the most serious concern" that Iran's declarations "did not amount to the correct, complete and final

Colombian troops kill 20 leftist rebels

BOGOTA, Colombia (AP)—Colombian troops clashed with leftist rebels and outlawed paramilitaries in separate offensives, killing 20 fighters and capturing 57 others, the army said Wednesday.

The fiercest fighting took place Tuesday in a rural area near Zetaquirá, 80 miles northeast of Bogotá, in which nine members of the rebel Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia, or FARC, were killed.

Among the dead was a regional FARC leader, Arcesio Angarilla, accused of carrying out attacks on energy targets and bridges, planting land mines and ordering several kidnappings, said the commander of the army's Fifth Division, Gen. Hernan Alonso Ortiz.

Two other FARC rebels died in fighting Tuesday in a remote area in Tolima province, southeast of Bogotá, while one guerrilla was killed in combat in the Sucre region, to the north of the capital. Another 40 suspected rebels were rounded up in separate operations over the past 24 hours across the country, the army said in a statement.

Soldiers also killed eight right-wing paramilitary fighters during clashes in a rural area near Ginebra, 170 miles southwest of Bogotá. Seventeen

suspected paramilitaries were also captured, including a regional financial chief.

Colombia's civil war, now in its 40th year, pits two leftist rebel groups against right-wing paramilitary factions and government forces. An estimated 3,500 people are killed every year.

Separately, paramilitary chief Carlos Castano was sentenced in absentia to 38 years in prison for ordering the assassination of a popular journalist who had lobbied for the release of FARC hostages and met with rebel leaders several times, a lawyer for the victim's family said Wednesday.

Lawyer Alirio Uribe said a Bogotá court convicted Castano on Tuesday after an investigation that nevertheless failed to identify the two hired gunmen who shot Jaime Garzon as he headed to his office at the Radionet radio station in Bogotá in 1998.

Castano, who is in hiding to avoid arrest on numerous charges ranging from terrorism to homicide as well as U.S. charges of drug trafficking, has denied he ordered Garzon's murder. Castano is currently pursuing peace talks with the government aimed at disbanding his 12,000-strong faction by 2006.

US forces to intervene in Haiti violence

By PAISLEY DODDS
AP WRITER

PORT-AU-PRINCE, Haiti (AP)—Gerard Latortue, a former U.N. official chosen to lead Haiti out of political turmoil, returned from the United States Wednesday to begin the arduous task of building a government. Loyalists of the former president said they wouldn't accept him.

His arrival came as the U.S. military announced an escalation in its mission in the Caribbean nation, promising Marines will move quickly to stop Haitian-against-Haitian violence.

"They will intervene to protect life," Gen. James T. Hill, commander of U.S. Southern Command, told reporters at the Pentagon.

Since Sunday, Marines have killed at least four Haitians, including a driver who sped toward a checkpoint and a gunman who fired on an anti-Aristide demonstration. On Tuesday, the American troops shot to death two Haitians who opened fire near the outgoing prime minister's private residence.

After walking off a plane that brought him from Florida, Latortue shook hands with police officers and embraced relatives and friends. He was



AP
People walk past burning tires and stones on a street near the airport during a protest after a man was killed by U.S. Marines in Port-au-Prince, Haiti on Tuesday, March 9, 2004. According to a spokesman for the U.S. Military, U.S. Marines shot and killed Mutial Telusma, a taxi driver, as he was speeding toward a military checkpoint late Monday night.

also greeted by members of a council that chose him to be the new prime minister.

Once critical of ousted President Jean-Bertrand Aristide, he has said his first priority will be to unite a

population divided between those who oppose the former leader and supporters who want to see him returned to power.

Aristide fled Feb. 29 amid international pressure to step down and a bloody rebellion that

left more than 300 dead. The once popular slum priest, elected on promises to champion the poor, lost support as Haitians accused his government of corruption and attacks against his political opponents.

In the Central African Republic, Aristide still maintained he is the legitimate leader of Haiti and that U.S. officials forced him from office. On Wednesday, his lawyers said they were preparing cases

accusing authorities in the United States and France of abducting him and forcing him into exile.

U.S. officials have denied they forced Aristide from office, saying they helped him escape Haiti with his life as rebels advanced on the capital.

Staff Sgt. Timothy Edwards said Marines were patrolling near the private residence of outgoing Prime Minister Yvon Neptune on Tuesday when they were shot at. The Marines fired back and killed at least two gunmen, he said. No peacekeepers were wounded.

The gunmen's bodies were not recovered but that is common. Peacekeepers must call health authorities to collect the remains, and family members sometimes take bodies away before they can be reported.

In a separate incident, several people got out of a car late Tuesday and opened fire on Marines, who shot back, U.S. Maj. Richard Crusan said. Three people then fled on foot, he said.

A body was still on the sidewalk early Wednesday near where the shooting occurred. Crusan and others refused to say whether the victim, who had been shot in the head, was involved.

Police investigate latest Juarez slaying

CIUDAD JUAREZ, Mexico (AP)—The partially clad body of a woman was found in the desert Wednesday outside Ciudad Juarez, where hundreds of young women and girls have been murdered over the past decade.

A truck driver discovered the body along a desert road in Anapra, a poor, desert neighborhood where many of the bodies have been found over the past decade, said Manuel Esparza of the government's special prosecutor's office for crimes against women.

The attorney general's office estimates that 258 women have been killed since 1993 in Ciudad Juarez, a city of 1.3 million across from El Paso, Texas. A report last week by London-

based Amnesty International put the number at 407.

The woman's body was found with her pants pulled down, her blouse covering her head and was wearing no underwear, just as more than 100 of the victims have been found. The bodies of three young rape victims were discovered in the same area last year, Esparza said.

Esparza said authorities were still trying to determine the cause of death. El Paso investigators joined Mexican federal and state authorities at the scene.

Paula Flores was among dozens of residents who watched investigators at the site. Her 17-year-old daughter Maria Sagrario Gonzalez was kidnapped and killed in 1998.

"It's sad," she said. "The cases don't stop, they continue."

The killings have drawn international outrage. Women's rights activists and Hollywood celebrities, including Jane Fonda and Sally Field, have joined families to demand the cases be solved.

National and international human rights groups and many of the victims' relatives blame police corruption and incompetence for allowing the murders to continue. They say police have tampered with evidence, tortured suspects and forced confessions from them.

Hundreds of police in Chihuahua state, where Ciudad Juarez is located, have been fired over the past few years for corruption.

Norway lawmakers facing Easter egg crisis

OSLO, Norway (AP)—Norwegian lawmakers couldn't help but cackle Wednesday when a legislator demanded the government outline plans for countering a looming Easter egg crisis.

A new law cuts the amount of time stores can keep fresh eggs on their shelves from 40 days to 28, leading the egg industry to warn that there could be a shortage over Easter.

Coloring Easter eggs and going on Easter egg hunts is a popular pastime among Norwegian children, who enjoy about six days off school around the holiday.

Oeystein Hedstroem, of the right-wing Party of Progress, found the shortage threat so worrisome that he raised it raised during the lawmaker's weekly question-and-answer session with the government.

"We lack 3.3 million eggs," Hedstroem said. "Will the minister of agriculture lower import duties during that period if Norwegian suppliers can't meet demand?"

Agriculture Minister Lars Sponheim, unable to keep a straight face, was summoned by the parliament's president to answer.

"President, it could be tempting to say that every man should have a hen, and then this would be solved," Sponheim said as the usually serious parliament burst out laughing.

"Hens generally lay one egg per day, and not significantly more during holidays. And that means they have a little problem meeting the holidays and peaks," he said.

A deadpan Sponheim then promised that "the government will contribute, to the best of its ability, to the Norwegian people getting eggs at Easter."

PSS007

Blaze devastates Nigerian shantytown

By GLENN MCKENZIE
AP WRITER

LAGOS, Nigeria (AP)—An overturned candle ignited a fire that raged through a shantytown in Nigeria's commercial capital, destroying hundreds of ramshackle homes and leaving thousands of impoverished shack-dwellers homeless, officials said Wednesday.

Although the casualty toll remained unclear, hospitals treated residents for serious burns.

"I lost everything. Nothing left," cried 40-year-old Mojirayo Ojugbele, who fled with her two children and one squawking chicken, held protectively under her arm. "After we eat this, maybe we will starve."

Residents said the blaze began late Tuesday when a candle tipped inside a home in Okobaba, a warren of shacks and sawmills along the edge of a lagoon in Lagos.

Within minutes, rickety tin-roofed structures of roughhewn boards and woodchip pathways were ablaze, with 60-foot-high flames.

Many fled carrying whatever meager belongings they could—mattresses, TVs and electric fans—while others formed bucket brigades. A few

young men were chased away, accused of looting.

By the time the fire died down near dawn Wednesday, Okobaba was a smoking ruin of ash and twisted metal.

Some residents faulted the sporadic supply of electricity, saying that forced residents to use more hazardous candles and kerosene lamps.

Others blamed the fire department, which they alleged sent a fire truck without any water. A state official, speaking on condition of anonymity, said fire engines had not been able to get close enough to the congested area.

Officials from Nigeria's National Emergency Management Agency said more than 500 individual dwellings had been destroyed and thousands were believed homeless, another official said, speaking on condition of anonymity. Many homes had families of 5-10 people each.

Many lost their livelihoods as well. As residents picked through the ashes, others fought tearful fistfights with passersby that they accused of looting their meager belongings—iron kettles, clay pots, tools and motor parts.

Lagos, with 14 million people, is the largest city in sub-Saharan Africa.



Residents scavenge for useable household materials after a devastating fire rendered hundreds homeless in Lagos, Nigeria, Wednesday March 10, 2004. The casualty figures remain unknown.

AP

Brazil: Records on suppression destroyed

BRASILIA, Brazil (AP)—The Brazilian army burned all the documents related to their suppression of a guerrilla insurgency in the 1970s, in accordance with the law, the government said Wednesday.

Defense Minister Jose Viegas said the documents were destroyed "many years ago," probably in the 1970s or 1980s.

"All the documents were burned in accordance with the law," Viegas said. "They were not destroyed in a clandestine manner. They were destroyed officially."

Viegas did not say which law allowed for the documents to be burned.

The documents refer to the army's suppression of the Araguaia Guerrillas who tried to foment a revolt against the country's 1964-85 military dictatorship in the southern Amazon state of Tocantins.

The revelation that the documents were burned comes just as the government has begun searching for the bodies

of several guerrillas for the first time with the help of the army.

Cecilia Coimbra, vice president of the rights group Torture Never Again, called the revelation "absurd."

"To know the history of the country is the right of every citizen," she said. "At the very minimum it disrespects the relatives of those who died."

The guerrilla insurgency began in 1966 with about 70 people. By 1973, half the insurgents had either been killed or imprisoned, including the current president of Brazil's governing Workers Party, Jose Genoino.

In late 1973 and 1974, Brazil's army tortured and killed all the guerrillas remaining in the Araguaia region.

At least 300 people disappeared or were killed by government forces during Brazil's military dictatorship. Relatives of more than 20 disappeared guerrilla fighters have fought for two decades to force the military to help find their remains.

Britain frees 2nd ex-Guantanamo detainee

LONDON (AP)—Police released a second Briton who had returned to this country with four other men after detention by the U.S. military at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, officials said Wednesday.

The 26-year-old man had been released without charge, police said, without disclosing his name. Two of the former detainees were aged 26.

The release of the first man, Jamal al-Harith, 37, came Tuesday evening, shortly after the ex-detainees landed at Northolt Royal Air Force Base.

Al-Harith wants the U.S. authorities "to answer for the injustice which he has suffered," said his lawyer, Robert Lizar.

"He has been detained as an innocent person for a period of two years. He has been treated in a cruel, inhumane and degrading manner. He wants the authorities to answer for that," Lizar added.

The other returnees were arrested under an anti-terrorism laws and taken to a high-security police station in west London.

The men's lawyers and relatives claim they are innocent and insist they should be freed as well. They say the suspects deserve liberty after spending as much as two years at the U.S.

detention camp in Cuba without charge or access to lawyers.

Riasoth Ahmed said earlier he had not yet been allowed to see his son, who was held with the others at the high-security Paddington Green police station. Police can detain them for up to 14 days without charge.

"My wife has been crying for the last 18 months and I am angry," Riasoth Ahmed, father of prisoner Ruhul Ahmed, told reporters outside his home in Tipton, central England. "For 18 months, I have been saying he is not a terrorist. ... They should let him go free."

The situation could put Prime Minister Tony Blair's government in an awkward spot: He has stressed the men must be handled carefully because they could pose a security risk, but prosecutors, not Blair's ministers, will decide whether to press charges.

Gareth Peirce, a lawyer for prisoners Asif Iqbal and Shafiq Rasul, criticized British police for their treatment of the detainees, saying officers made her sleep-deprived clients undergo fingerprinting procedures for too long and kept them in cold cells.

"We told the police that they are simply compounding the unlawfulness of the last two

years," Peirce said.

Max Clifford, spokesman for the family of Tarek Dergoul, said Dergoul's brother had told him the prisoner was having trouble walking, but Clifford did not know why.

"Physically, he is in quite a bad way," Clifford said. "The cause of that I do not know, but when he went away he didn't have any problems."

Dergoul's lawyer, Louise Christian, said he was exhausted. "My very strong view is that there is no basis whatsoever for holding Tarek Dergoul under the Terrorism Act," she said.

A spokesman for the families of Ahmed, Iqbal and Rasul said the three made brief calls to their relatives after arriving in Britain.

"The families have told them that they are now in the care of British authorities and they don't have anything to worry about ... and just to share the fact that they should cooperate," said the spokesman, who declined to be identified.

He said the families did not want to comment further for fear of compromising the men's cases, but that all were innocent.

Families of the five returnees have said they were mistakenly caught up in the U.S. war on terrorism.

Venezuela to file complaint against US

CARACAS, Venezuela (AP)—The government of President Hugo Chavez said Wednesday it will file a complaint with the Organization of American States, accusing the United States of meddling in Venezuela's domestic affairs.

Venezuela's ambassador to the OAS, Jorge Valero, said he plans to present proof that Washington has given financial and logistical support to opposition groups pushing for Chavez's ouster.

"Democratic rules must be respected. It can't be permitted that a foreign government is breaking them and supporting groups that try to destabilize the democratic institutions in Venezuela," Valero said.

Citing documents obtained under the U.S. Freedom of Information Act, Chavez has accused the National Endowment for Democracy, an American nonprofit agency, of interfering in Venezuelan affairs by funding opposition groups. The endowment receives U.S. government money.

Venezuela says the endowment gave money to Sumate, a Venezuelan group that organized a recall petition against Chavez, and the Venezuelan Workers Confederation, which led a 2003 strike that failed to topple the president.

Valero said the complaint would likely be presented to the 34-nation body on Tuesday.

The United States has repeatedly denied trying to overthrow Chavez, noting the endowment funds democratic movements worldwide.

Chavez, a former military commander who was elected in 1998 and re-elected in 2000, has accused the United States of backing a 2002 coup that briefly ousted him.

On Tuesday, Chavez told foreign oil executives that economic ties between the United States and Venezuela should remain stable despite Washington's alleged efforts to overthrow his "revolutionary" government.

Chavez had earlier vowed to halt oil exports to the U.S. and wage a "100-year war" if Washington ever tried to invade Venezuela.

U.S. officials disapprove of Chavez's increasingly close ties with Cuba's Fidel Castro and his criticism of U.S.-led negotiations for a free trade zone of the Americas.

Also Wednesday, a group of Venezuelan newspaper owners accused the government of violating press freedoms and human rights during recent protests and said it would file a complaint with the Inter American Press Association, a Miami-based watchdog group.

Life & Style

Iran’s empress in exile finds a ‘way to go on’

By NORA BOUSTANY
THE WASHINGTON POST

It could be the eternal wisdom of Persia’s great poets, an unforgettable bond to Iran and an everlasting love for a ruler the world shunned in his last days that have kept Farah Pahlavi anchored.

She has suffered in her 25 years since the shah, Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, piloted his family out of Iran. Widowed since 1980, she remains philosophical about her losses, the dizzying highs and lows her journey has involved.

“There are days where I find myself depressed and tired. ... People write to me and they want me to give them courage,” said Pahlavi, 66. “Life is a struggle, for everyone at every level, but you should not lose your dignity. To go on is the struggle of life.

“There are so many answers in Persian poetry. A blue sky, love of family and nature. All this gives me positive energy,” said Pahlavi in a recent interview in her suburban Potomac, Md., home, decorated with kilim carpets, modern Iranian paintings and a bronze bust of the shah. “At the end, it is in yourself that you have to find the way to go on.”

The memoir of her life as a glamorous empress who had to give up everything the face of historical upheaval is called “An Enduring Love: My Life With the Shah,” published in English by Miramax Books. The book, which was translated from French, topped bestseller lists for weeks last fall in France.

In it, she chronicles Iran’s plunge into chaos and arbitrary executions in the revolution’s early days, and her

husband’s battle with cancer.

She describes the humiliation of becoming a diplomatic burden in search of a haven and medical care at the height of the U.S. hostage crisis in Tehran. She details the political maneuvering she and her husband faced as they jetted from Egypt to the United States, the Bahamas, Mexico and Panama before finally residing in Egypt.

She follows every newscast and development in Iran as if still there, and each day answers e-mail from students in Iran, parents worried about their children, or disillusioned expatriates who need moral support.

Three years ago, Pahlavi was overcome with grief as her youngest daughter was losing a battle with depression, eating disorders and a dependence on sleeping pills. Leila, 31, died in a London hotel room in 2001.

“I felt so miserable, I started then,” she said of beginning the memoir.

In the summer of 1959 in France, while trying to obtain a scholarship to continue her architecture studies in Paris, a chance encounter with the shah developed into a romance. They married later that year.

If she has one regret, Pahlavi said, it is not spending more private time with her husband and four children. Her happiest memories are of giving birth, and of traveling around the



Iranian countryside, where she met ordinary people. “I always wanted to travel without maids, or cross the Iranian desert on camel back. Apparently, it is an unbelievable experience,” she said longingly.

Longtime acquaintance Haleh Esfandiari, who served as deputy director of one of Pahlavi’s many cultural foundations, said that “she never lost that popular touch. She was genuine. While the shah gave the impression of being distant, she allowed people to rush and embrace her while visiting the provinces.”

Pahlavi describes the final scene of tearful farewells with palace personnel throwing themselves at the shah’s feet, and the cook who grabbed his copper pots and bags of lentils and beans to take with him on the plane.

“When we look back, we all had a part in this revolution,” she said of her countrymen. “They all, in a sort of hysteria, thought religious men could bring freedom and democracy.” Of the grand ayatollah who led the 1979 Islamic revolution, she said, “Khomeini used them all.

The political

jockeying by some members of the royal entourage after her husband’s death still stings. “It’s very hard to have seen one side of human beings, then have to see the other side, their actions and words, coming from people who were close to you,” she said. “I have tried to put myself above it.”

“If you have to cross the desert to reach your goal, go,” she said, borrowing from the words of Hafiz, one of Iran’s most celebrated poets. “Pay no heed to the wounding thorns.”

Farah Pahlavi, at home in Potomac, Md., describes her life as the empress of Iran and exile after the 1979 Islamic revolution in her memoir, “An Enduring Love: My Life With the Shah.”

THE WASHINGTON POST



palau

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A spiritual masterwork from an atheist

By KENNETH TURAN
LOS ANGELES TIMES

HOLLYWOOD—It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for disinterested parties to see “The Passion,” Mel Gibson’s much talked about film on the death of Jesus Christ. But no matter how good or bad it has turned out to be, “The Passion’s” partisans are missing out when they claim there’s never been a great film on the subject before. There has, and it couldn’t come from a more unlikely source.

“The Gospel According to St. Matthew” is a little-seen 1964 masterpiece by the controversial Italian director Pier Paolo Pasolini, a film that veteran British critic Alexander Walker was not alone in proclaiming “grips the historical and psychological imagination like no other religious film I have ever seen.”

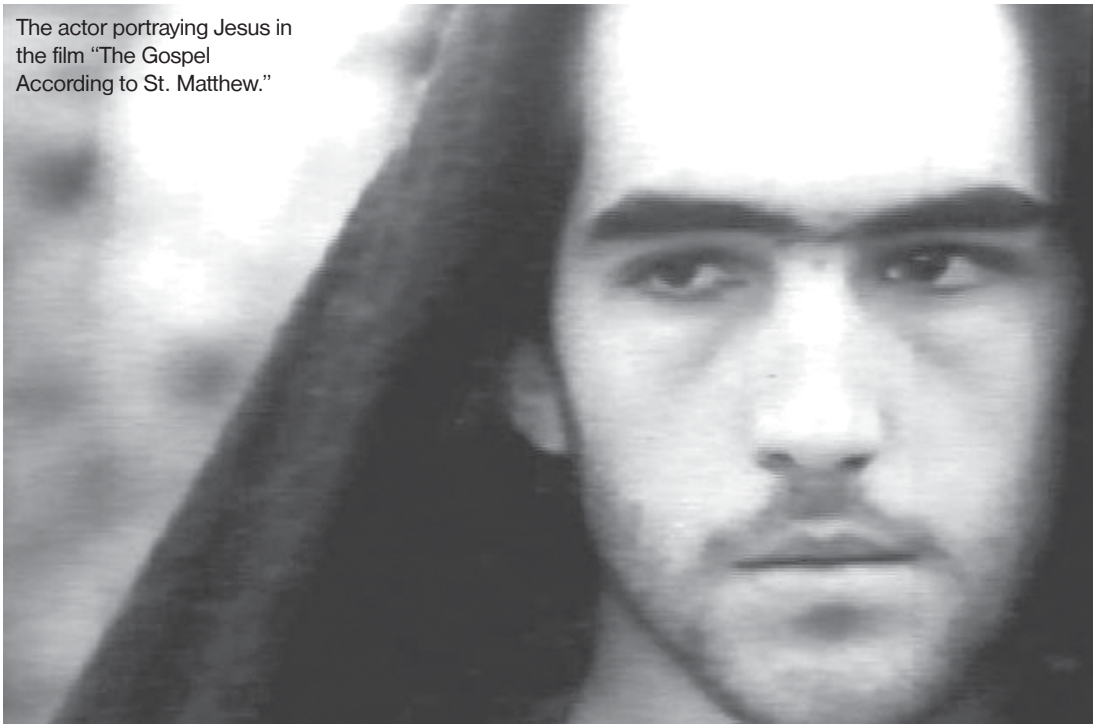
And there have been others. Many others. According to Roy Kinnard and Tim Davis’ “Divine Images: A History of Jesus on the Screen,” some 47 actors have played Christ between 1897 and 1989, everyone from Jeffrey Hunter and Max Von Sydow to Willem Dafoe and even Zalman King. Yet none of their films reached the heights that Pasolini’s did.

A Catholic turned atheist and a committed Marxist who got into trouble with both the party and the church for his unapologetic homosexuality, Pasolini was often indicted for blasphemy and later made films like “Salo” that were declared obscene by Italian courts. His brutal death at age 53 came at the hands of a 17-year-old boy he’d picked up in a bar.

Yet this man’s “St. Matthew” (available on video) was justly considered to be one of the most spiritual films ever made. It won the grand prize of the International Catholic Film Office and was one of 45 films recommended by the Vatican in 1996 in honor of the centenary of cinema.

That was an action that fellow director Franco Zeffirelli (whose films did not make the list) huffily condemned because the director

The actor portraying Jesus in the film “The Gospel According to St. Matthew.”



had been “not only mediocre but also an atheist.” Yet no zealous true believer could have made a more effective work on the subject than this dynamic and respectful film, and seeing it again in anticipation of Gibson’s epic leads to a new appreciation of how improbable and complete its success was.

For not only was Pasolini an implausible filmmaker for the subject matter, his film is an unlooked-for amalgam of disparate elements and influences not guaranteed to blend smoothly. Yet—one is tempted to say miraculously—they do.

The lines in Pasolini’s spare Italian-language screenplay are all from Matthew, and the director has found ways to make sentiments like “man shall not live by bread alone” and “the poor shall you always have with you” resound with the power of something spoken for the first time.

If the words are traditional, the film’s music is not. Yes, there is Bach, but there is also the forceful African Missa Luba and the blues of Son House. Odetta’s version of “Motherless Child” makes an unexpected appearance, and the music Prokofiev wrote for the German slaughter of babies in Eisenstein’s “Alexander Nevsky” fits perfectly behind Herod’s

massacre of the innocents.

Even more nontraditional is the bleak setting of Calabria in southern Italy, which Pasolini chose after scouting and rejecting locations in Israel. Stunningly photographed in black and white by Tonino Delli Colli, the parched hill towns and ruined buildings of the area seem to be part of the same universe as ancient Palestine, donkeys and all.

Pasolini’s key decision was to shoot this story in the great Italian tradition of neo-realism, using nonprofessional actors for all the roles and selecting a young Spanish student named Enrique Irazoqui to play his charismatic, active Christ.

Determined to give Christ’s words their full weight, Pasolini had Irazoqui’s voice dubbed by actor Enrico Maria Salerno. And he did give cameos to people he knew—the novelist Natalia Ginzburg played Mary of Bethany, and Pasolini’s own mother played Mary grieving at the cross. But what stays with you more are the marvelous faces of local people, each one a book in itself, that give this story exceptional resonance.

Because simplicity is his watchword, there is something elevating about Pasolini’s

conception, something of the power and deeply moving nature of the great silent films in what he has done. Everyone in the narrative seems to sense that they are part of what believers will eventually come to call the greatest story ever told.

Because he wanted to, in his own words, “re-mythicize” the events of Christ’s life, because of the paradox that “I, a nonbeliever, was telling the story through the eyes of a believer,” Pasolini ended up giving this story an unshakable sense of actuality. We experience that much-recounted life as if we were watching it for the very first time, almost in a newsreel.

Pasolini may not have believed, but the dynamic power of belief is behind the lasting work he does here. Unwilling to be pigeonholed either aesthetically or philosophically, Pasolini had a thoughtful response when asked how a Marxist could make a film like “The Gospel According to St. Matthew.” He called it “a reaction against the conformity of Marxism. The mystery of life and death and of suffering—and particularly of religion . . . is something that Marxists do not want to consider. But these are and always have been questions of great importance for human beings.”

A guys’ night of globetrotting

By CHRIS ERSKINE
Los Angeles Times

We’re out celebrating a guys’ night out, a rare jailbreak from the home and family. When we fled, sirens sounded and dogs barked. Shots were fired into the cold night air. Yet we all made it out alive, to this steak joint at the center of town. All six of us a little nuts with middle age. “How great is this?” one guys asks as we gather in a corner booth.

“Pretty great,” someone answers.

“Cheers,” someone says, raising a glass.

Finally, a guys’ night out. What did we have to lose? Our mortgages? The comp time we never take? The knowledge that someone warm and tolerant awaits when we get home late? Well, there’s that.

“She was not happy about this,” one guy mutters into his vodka. “My wife was not happy at all.”

“Stinkin’ Yankees,” someone notes, and we’re off onto another topic.

Some of the guys know each other. Others have just met. As men, we are automatically bound by the things we hate. The Yankees. Politicians. Sales tax. Free agency. “Frasier.” Worst of all, that new Dodger owner.

“This guy’s going to be a disaster,” one guy predicts.

“I hope you’re wrong.”

“I’m not,” the guy growls, attacking a piece of warm bread.

And bound, as well, by the things we all love. Beefsteak. Ferraris. Eighteenth fairways. Crossover dribbles. Long, perfumed necks. The heroes of our youth.

“Remember when you were a kid...?” I start to say.

“No,” someone answers.

“Remember when you were a kid and you thought the Globetrotters could’ve beaten the Knicks or the Celtics?” I ask.

“And you thought Curly Neal was the best guard of all time,” someone else says.

“He was,” one of my friends confirms.

We search the lost-and-found departments of our middle-age minds. Eyes twinkle. Voices rise. Boyhoods are reborn.

“Remember the way Meadowlark always hit that half-court shot?” one guy asks.

“Yep, every time.”

“To me, it’s still the most impressive thing I’ve ever seen in sports.”

The food arrives. The baked potatoes hot as engine blocks. The meat quickly smeared with horseradish, our most underrated condiment.

“Everything cooked OK?” the waitress asks.

“I’ve been cooked since noon,” someone says.

“Dean Martin,” someone notes. “Now there was an entertainer.”

We wipe our Friday faces with scratchy napkins and head off to Staples, dropping down from the 110 as if landing on another planet, which Staples often is. It’s a Laker Friday. The Sixers are in town.

“Left! Left! Left!” someone shouts to the driver as we search for the parking lot.

“Did he say left?” the driver calmly asks.

“Left!!!”

Staples, as usual, has the sweet ambience of a gentleman’s club. Same music. Same cheap carpet and expensive booze. Same sense of manufactured joy. All it needs is stripper poles.

“Don’t you love this place?” someone asks.

“Of course,” I say.

This citadel of restraint is in fine Friday mode. The men all look like real-estate moguls or fading rock stars. The women look like actresses from Latin soap operas. Where do they find clothes like this? What holds their chests up?

With those questions hanging in the air, we welcome the Lakers, who play well if not wisely. The Globetrotters would’ve put these Sixers away in the third quarter. Meadowlark would’ve nailed that half-court shot, sprayed confetti all over the Philadelphia bench, and it would’ve been over. Over! But not the Lakers. They toy with the other team till well into the last quarter.

“Let’s get outta here,” someone orders.

“We’ve got places to go,” someone adds.

“We do?” I say.

“Let’s roll.”

‘Shrek 2’ towers over the competition

By DEBORAH HORNBLow
THE HARTFORD COURANT

With the Academy Awards and all of the 2003 film biz safely in the can, it is time to focus on spring movie releases.

If the number of sequels, copycats and remakes sometimes makes looking ahead seem like looking back, it is hardly surprising. Nothing succeeds like box office success.

On slate for the green season is the eagerly anticipated “Shrek 2,” along with “Agent Cody Banks 2: Destination London” and “Scooby Doo 2: Monsters Unleashed.”

Among the films bearing more than a passing resemblance

to previous films are “Connie and Carla,” a “Some Like It Hot” clone from Nia Vardalos of “My Big Fat Greek Wedding,” and “Walking Tall,” a remake of the 1973 film, starring The Rock.

Several spring titles continue the Hollywood tradition of turning popular comic-book characters into film icons. Dark Horse comic “Hellboy” is ready for his close-up, the latest to join the ranks of Spider-Man, Superman and Batman in hopes of creating a franchise. “The Punisher” turns yet another Marvel Comics character into a live-action movie.

Springtime star vehicles continue the venerable Tinseltown tradition of banking on stars. The

pictures include the Stephen King novella adaptation “Secret Window” with Johnny Depp; “Man on Fire” with Denzel Washington; “The Alamo” with Dennis Quaid and Billy Bob Thornton; “Taking Lives” with Angelina Jolie and Ethan Hawke; the Coen brothers’ heist pic “The Ladykillers,” with Tom Hanks as the unctuous con man played by Alec Guinness in the 1955 original; and Kevin Smith’s “Jersey Girl,” starring Ben Affleck and Jennifer Lopez, former flames whose failed relationship and disastrous attempts at co-starring (remember “Gigli”?) could be signs of a hex.

Finally and most happily,

spring boasts a handful of promising originals. Among them: “Troy,” Wolfgang Peterson’s historical drama re-creating the Battle of Troy; “Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind” from screenwriter Charlie Kaufman (“Adaptation,” “Being John Malkovich”); “Envy,” a comedy about money and friendship starring Ben Stiller and Jack Black; and Disney’s “Home on the Range,” which is generating enough barnyard noise to suggest the coming of a new animated classic.

No season would be complete without an end-of-the-world disaster pic, so Roland Emmerich’s “The Day After Tomorrow” brings doomsday to the theater in late May.

WALLACE

Man's recurring two-year itch leaves wife short of scratch

By ABIGAIL VAN BUREN

DEAR ABBY: I am a 28-year-old mother of three. I have been married to their father, "Carl," for eight years.

Every two years, Carl decides he no longer wants to be a family man and packs up and leaves. When he goes, he leaves me destitute. I am a stay-at-home mom with only a high school degree.

Carl feels he should have to give us money only after his own needs and wants have been taken care of, and then only the amount he chooses. The most he will dole out is \$50 to \$100 at a time.

This time when he left, I warned him I'd file for child support. We were on speaking terms, and he said he loved me and wanted us to reunite. That was until he was served with the support papers. Now he refuses to return my calls until I drop the suit. I love Carl, but I can't let him withhold support from our children. He has a good job, so there is no reason for this.

Am I unreasonable? Should I drop the suit? I want our family back together, but I'm afraid he'll leave again. What should I do?

NEEDS SUPPORT IN TEXAS

DEAR NEEDS SUPPORT: For the sake of your children, do not allow yourself to be manipulated or emotionally blackmailed. Take your cues from your lawyer. Once a fair amount of child support has been established in a court of law or by mediation, offer Carl the option of marriage counseling. If he's sincere about wanting to reconcile, he will agree.

If he returns, I urge you to use that opportunity to go back to school and prepare yourself to be financially independent. I have said this many times before: No one's future is guaranteed. If something should happen to your husband, you may need to be the breadwinner. So be prepared.

DEAR ABBY: Several months ago I lost my mother to cancer. I am still trying to comfort myself. My four children were close to their grandmother, especially my 6-year-old daughter, "Vicki."

Vicki comes to me crying and says she misses Grandma. When she does, I comfort her as best I can, but it's hard because I haven't let go and allowed myself to have a really good cry.

Is it OK for Vicki to see me cry? I'm afraid I won't be able to stop once I start. And if that happens, how can I comfort my daughter?

Every week, I take fresh flowers to the cemetery. Vicki always wants to go with me, but I've taken her only twice. Do you think it might help her to go with me? I'm worried that taking her to the cemetery will only reopen the wound of losing her grandma.

WANTING TO GRIEVE

DEAR WANTING: You have my sympathy for the loss of your dear mother. I am concerned that you do not have an outlet for your grief. Please consult your doctor or clergyperson about locating a grief support group to help you through this difficult time.

I see nothing wrong with allowing your daughter to occasionally accompany you to the cemetery. It will teach her that although her grandmother is gone, she is not forgotten. I also see nothing wrong with her seeing you cry. However, if you think you might lose control and be unable to stop, don't do it, because it would frighten her.

Dear Abby is written by Abigail Van Buren, also known as Jeanne Phillips, and was founded by her mother, Pauline Phillips. Write Dear Abby at www.DearAbby.com or P.O. Box 69440, Los Angeles, CA 90069.

Good advice for everyone—teens to seniors—is in "The Anger in All of Us and How to Deal With It." To order, send a business-size, self-addressed envelope, plus check or money order for \$5 (U.S. funds only) to: Dear Abby, Anger Booklet, P.O. Box 447, Mount Morris, IL 61054-0447. (Postage is included.)



Dear Abby

'American Idol' picks 12 finalists

LOS ANGELES (AP)—Fox's "American Idol" is down to a dozen would-be superstars.

The starmaking game show announced the last four finalists Wednesday, setting two months of song-and-dance competition that will culminate in a new musical favorite in May.

The four "wild card" candidates included one selected by an audience vote: Jon Peter Lewis, a 24-year-old Idaho resident whose dance-happy rendition of an Elvis Presley song had voters rooting for him.

The other three finalists were picked by the show's judges.

Randy Jackson selected Jennifer Hudson, 22, a cruise line singer from Chicago whose voice has impressed the judges, even if her fashion sense hasn't. Paula Abdul tabbed Leah LaBelle, 17, of Seattle.

Cranky Simon Cowell chose George Huff, 23, a music education major who has performed in many churches in Louisiana.

The four join the already selected finalists, including Fantasia Barrino, 19, High Point, N.C.; Diana Degarmo, 16, Snellville, Ga.; Camile Velasco, 18, Haiku, Hawaii; and Matthew Rogers, 25, Rancho Cucamonga, Calif.



Eight of Fox's "American Idol" finalists are shown in this photo combo. Top row from left: Camile Velasco, Fantasia Barrino, Diana Degarmo, and Matthew Rogers. Bottom row from left: La Toya London, Amy Adams, Jasmine Trias, and John Stevens.

Other finalists are La Toya London, 24, Hawthorne, Calif.; Amy Adams, 24, Bakersfield, Calif.; Jasmine Trias, 17, Mililani, Hawaii, and John Stevens, 16, East Amherst, N.Y.

The group will perform March 16 in a two-hour live show, 8-10 p.m. EST. The top

four finalists will be announced on May 5, with the series finale May 25-26.

More than 70,000 people turned out at "American Idol" tryouts nationwide for the third season, according to Fox.

Past "American Idol" winners include Kelly Clarkson

and Ruben Studdard, who both had top 10 releases. But the biggest Idol is 2003 runner-up Clay Aiken.

Studdard returned to perform his latest recording Wednesday, and even made Cowell nostalgic.

"I will pay you to re-enter," Cowell told him.

Diana Ross ordered to serve jail time

TUCSON, Ariz. (AP)—Diana Ross was ordered to return to Tucson to serve a two-day jail sentence in her drunken-driving case.

The singer, who pleaded no contest to DUI last month, had arranged to serve her sentence in Greenwich, Conn., where she lives. But during her stay, she left and returned multiple times, said City Court Magistrate T. Jay Cranshaw.

Greenwich Police Chief James Walters originally wrote Cranshaw to say that Ross, 59, had completed her sentence, spending 48 hours in custody

over three days, including two overnight stays.

Cranshaw asked for a full accounting of the time spent there, and it turns out Ross spent only 47 hours in police custody.

Arizona law requires DUI defendants to spend at least 24 consecutive hours in custody. Cranshaw said in a written order that the jail arrangement in Greenwich "clearly does not comply with Arizona law."

"To avoid questions of impropriety, the defendant is ordered to return to Tucson to

serve 48 consecutive hours in the Pima County Jail," Cranshaw wrote in a March 4 order.

The original jail order sent to Greenwich didn't state that Ross had to serve 24 consecutive hours behind bars.

Ross, the former lead singer of The Supremes, has been on tour in Europe.

She was arrested Dec. 30, 2002, after someone reported seeing someone driving the wrong way on Tucson's northeast side.

A hearing is scheduled April 1 to schedule her new jail stay.

Mauled magician Roy Horn doing better

BERLIN (AP)—Illusionist Roy Horn of "Siegfried & Roy," who was mauled on stage by a tiger in October, says he's on the mend and is working hard with a physical therapist, a German magazine reported Wednesday.

"You know, I almost had two feet in the grave, but now I'm doing better," the weekly Bunte quoted Horn as saying in a telephone interview from his Las Vegas home.

"I have hired the same trainer

as Christopher Reeve and am working with him for nine hours a day," Horn added. Reeve, who played Clark Kent and his superhero alter ego in four "Superman" movies, was paralyzed from the neck down in a 1995 horseback-riding accident.

Horn, 59, asked Bunte to "spread the good news that you have spoken to me and that I'm doing well," the magazine said, adding that his voice was weaker

than usual but his mind was clear.

Roy's stage partner, Siegfried Fischbacher, has downplayed his partner's injuries from the attack. He said a stroke Horn suffered afterward resulted from blood pressure medication that sometimes made him feel faint.

Last week, a German-based spokeswoman for the duo, Claudia Dressler, said Horn was able to walk with the help of a wheeled walking aid.

More than 80 dogs chosen for new film

BETHEL, Maine (AP)—Producers have almost all the dogs they need for a movie scheduled to begin filming in western Maine later this month—though they still need human extras.

"The 12 Dogs of Christmas" will tell the story of a boy who uses dogs to teach people about the meaning of Christmas

during the Depression era. The movie will be directed by Kieth Merrill.

Filmmakers want 84 dogs, including golden and Labrador retrievers, boxers, cocker spaniels and mongrels, to parody the English folksong, "The Twelve Days of Christmas."

"The only thing we're still

looking for is a couple of boxers," said casting director Bonnie Marshall.

Marshall said more than 250 people tried out for parts, either talking or as silent extras, in three auditioning sessions last week. Many brought pictures of their dogs, and many of the canine parts have been cast.

Mira Sorvino aiding Amnesty International

LOS ANGELES (AP)—Mira Sorvino is helping Amnesty International launch a two-year campaign to end violence against women.

The actress said Tuesday the campaign is intended to put pressure on governments around the world to

create policies that would discourage violence against women.

"Even in the United States, violence against women is the number one threat to women's safety in terms of their health," she said. "Women are more likely to be injured or killed by violence than by any other threat."

In many countries, Sorvino said, violence against women also can take the form of female infanticide or abortions of fetuses expected to be girls.

The campaign also aims to have rape classified as a war crime. Sorvino said for decades rape has been used as a tactic of war, particularly in ethnic conflicts such as the civil war in Rwanda.

The 36-year-old, who won a supporting-actress Oscar for Woody Allen's 1995 film "Mighty Aphrodite," also has appeared in "Romy and Michele's High School Reunion" and "The Replacement Killers."



Sorvino

Pastimes

CROSSWORD *By Eugene Sheffer*



STUMPED?

For answers to today's crossword, call **1-900-226-5955**! 99¢ per minute, touch-tone/rotary phones. (18+ only.) A King Features service, NYC.

CELEBRITIES BORN ON THIS DAY

Cindy Crawford, Andrew Shue, Brian Littrell, Ivana Trump

HAPPY BIRTHDAY: You may be sidetracked by an emotional problem that has been hanging over your head. Rid yourself of past issues so you can move forward. Change is in the offing, so clear your concerns. The turn of events will be much greater than even you can imagine. Your numbers are 6, 17, 22, 35, 41, 44

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ARIES (*March 21-April 19*)
Regardless of what you had planned on getting done today, you will find it difficult. Nothing will be as it appears. Make your own decisions if you want to be happy with the outcome. ★★



TAURUS (*April 20-May 20*)
Don't give in to the demands being put on you. You are right and you must not doubt yourself for even one minute. Patience will pay off big time. ★★★★★



GEMINI (*May 21-June 20*)
Put your time and effort into learning something new rather than trying to convince everyone to do things your way. Someone will try to meddle in your affairs, which could break a long-time friendship. ★★



CANCER (*June 21-July 22*)
You will be in the mood to get things done, so don't waste time. Join groups that can offer you as much as you can offer them. Relationships developed today will be satisfying. ★★★★★



LEO (*July 23-Aug.22*)
Go back over your personal papers to guarantee the tax breaks to which you're entitled. Make adjustments that will lead to a higher income or better return on your money. ★★★★★



VIRGO (*Aug. 23-Sept. 22*)
Listen to the grievances of both your business and emotional partner. You can make a difference and build a strong alliance if you are patient. Don't let your own emotions get in the way. ★★



LIBRA (*Sept. 23-Oct. 22*)
It's time to center yourself and determine what will make you feel the most relaxed. Once you have mastered a state of calm, you will be able to perform your duties with excellence. ★★



SCORPIO (*Oct. 23-Nov. 21*)
Love relationships will develop if you are single. If you are in a relationship, you can certainly rekindle the flame. You will develop an idea you have wanted to pursue for some time now. ★★★★★



SAGITTARIUS (*Nov. 22-Dec. 21*)
Not everything will be as it appears today. Don't trust what you are told. Someone will be leaving out some vital information that could make a difference to the choices you make. ★★



CAPRICORN (*Dec. 22-Jan. 19*)
Conversations will be packed full of new thoughts and ideas today. It's time for you to follow your heart and your dreams. ★★★★★



AQUARIUS (*Jan. 20-Feb. 18*)
If you want to make a work change, this is probably the time. Don't waste time procrastinating — set your goals high and shoot for the stars. ★★



PISCES (*Feb. 19-March 20*)
You may be feeling a little stressed out today. It may be time to backtrack and readdress what it is you are willing to do so you can move forward. ★★

BIRTHDAY BABY: You are sensitive and can get what you want by using emotional tactics. You are influential, intuitive and can make things happen. You have a vivid imagination and creative talent.

(Need advice? Check out Eugenia on the Web at www.astroadvice.com or www.eugenialast.com.)

Garfield®

Adam@home

The Duplex

By Glenn McCoy

Pastimes



NBA STANDINGS					
EASTERN CONFERENCE					
Atlantic Division					
	W	L	Pct	G	
New Jersey	39	25	.609	-	
Philadelphia	37	26	.587	1 1/2	
Boston	37	27	.578	2	
Orlando	33	33	.500	7	
Washington	31	33	.484	8	
New York	28	36	.438	11	
Miami	21	43	.328	18	
Central Division					
Detroit	40	23	.635	-	
Indiana	38	27	.585	3	
New Orleans	37	29	.561	4 1/2	
Milwaukee	32	33	.492	9	
Atlanta	26	39	.400	15	
Chicago	23	43	.348	18 1/2	
Toronto	20	42	.323	19 1/2	
Cleveland	11	53	.172	29 1/2	
WESTERN CONFERENCE					
Midwest Division					
Dallas	48	15	.762	-	
San Antonio	45	18	.714	3	
Minnesota	42	25	.627	8	
Utah	37	27	.578	11 1/2	
Houston	33	30	.524	15	
Memphis	23	41	.359	25 1/2	
Denver	14	51	.215	35	
Pacific Division					
Sacramento	45	19	.703	-	
Portland	42	22	.656	3	
L.A. Lakers	35	28	.556	9 1/2	
Phoenix	33	30	.524	11 1/2	
Golden State	31	33	.484	14	
Seattle	28	34	.452	16	
L.A. Clippers	20	44	.313	25	

NBA STANDINGS		
EASTERN CONFERENCE		
Atlantic Division		
Team	W	L
New Jersey	31	14
Boston	26	19
Philadelphia	24	22
Orlando	24	23
Washington	22	24
New York	19	25
Miami	16	29
Central Division		
Indiana	33	13
Detroit	29	15
New Orleans	24	22
Milwaukee	22	22
Chicago	17	28
Atlanta	17	29
Toronto	11	34
Cleveland	9	37
WESTERN CONFERENCE		
Midwest Division		
Dallas	35	9
San Antonio	29	16
Minnesota	27	18
Utah	27	18
Houston	24	20
Memphis	13	31
Denver	10	35
Pacific Division		
Sacramento	32	14
Portland	28	16
Phoenix	26	21
L.A. Lakers	20	23
Seattle	20	23
Golden State	20	24
L.A. Clippers	17	28

NBA STANDINGS		
EASTERN CONFERENCE		
Atlantic Division		
Orlando	2	0
New Jersey	1	0
Philadelphia	1	1
Boston	0	1
Miami	0	1
New York	0	1
Washington	0	1
Central Division		
Chicago	1	0
Detroit	1	0
Indiana	1	0
Toronto	1	0
New Orleans	0	0
Atlanta	0	1
Cleveland	0	1
Milwaukee	0	1
WESTERN CONFERENCE		
Midwest Division		
Dallas	1	0
Minnesota	1	0
San Antonio	1	0
Utah	0	0
Denver	0	1
Houston	0	1
Memphis	0	1
Pacific Division		
Sacramento	1	0
Portland	1	0
Golden State	0	0
L.A. Clippers	0	0
Phoenix	0	0
Seattle	0	0
L.A. Lakers	0	2
Wednesday's Games		
Chicago 99, Boston 96		
Indiana 91, Houston 82		
Toronto 74, Washington 68		
Philadelphia 95, Milwaukee 93		
Orlando 100, Miami 86		
New Jersey 105, Atlanta 94		
Dallas 119, Memphis 108		
Minnesota 83, Denver 77		
Detroit 86, New York 77		
Portland 102, L.A. Lakers 90		

Team	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	T
Giants	0	1	0	0	0	0	2	-	3	
Hustlers	1	0	1	4	2	0	0	5	-	13



SPORTS BRIEFS



Spurs defeat Mavericks, 111-104

Tony Parker scored a career-high 32 points, including seven free throws in the final minute, to lead the San Antonio Spurs to a 111-104 win over the division rival Dallas Mavericks on Wednesday night.

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Saipan Tribune
Sports

Yearend RGA champion tourney tomorrow

The Refaluwasch Golf Association will hold their yearend Club Champion Tournament tomorrow, December 14, at the Lao Lao West golf course.

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